

MORAL TRAINING FOR NATURE'S EGOTISTS: MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS
IN GEORGE ELIOT'S FICTION

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George Eliot's fiction is filled with mentoring relationships which generally consist of a wise male mentor and a foolish, egotistic female mentee. The mentoring narratives relate the conversion of the mentee from narcissism to selfless devotion to the community. By retaining the Christian value of self-abnegation and the Christian tendency to devalue nature, Eliot, nominally a secular humanist who abandoned Christianity, reveals herself still to be a covert Christian.

In Chapter 1 I introduce the moral mentoring theme and provide background material. Chapter 2 consists of an examination of *Felix Holt*, which clearly displays Eliot's crucial dichotomy: the moral is superior to the natural. In Chapter 3 I present a Freudian analysis of Gwendolen Harleth, the mentee most fully developed. In Chapter 4 I examine two early mentees, who differ from later mentees primarily in that they are not egotists and can be treated with sympathy. Chapter 5 covers three gender-modified relationships. These relationships show contrasting views of nature: in the Dinah Morris-Hetty Sorrel narrative, like most of the others, Eliot privileges the transcendence of nature. The other two, Mary Garth-Fred Vincy and Dolly Winthrop-Silas Marner, are exceptions as Eliot portrays in them a Wordsworthian reconciliation with nature. In Chapter 6 I focus on Maggie Tulliver, a mentee with three failed mentors and two antimentors. Maggie chooses regression over growth as symbolized by her drowning death in her brother's

arms. In Chapter 7 I examine *Middlemarch*, whose lack of a successful standard mentoring relationship contributes to its dark vision. Chapter 8 contains a reading of *Romola* which interprets Romola, the only mentee whose story takes place outside nineteenth-century England, as a feminist fantasy for Eliot. Chapter 9 concludes the discussion, focusing primarily on the question why the mentoring theme was so compelling for George Eliot. In the Appendix I examine the relationships in Eliot's life in which she herself was a mentee or a mentor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: GEORGE ELIOT'S MORAL MENTORING

[Gwendolen's] hidden helplessness gave fresh force to the hold Deronda had from the first taken on her mind, as one who had an unknown standard by which he judged her. Had he some way of looking at things which might be a new footing for her—an inward safeguard against possible events which she dreaded as stored-up retribution? It is one of the secrets in that change of mental poise which has been fitly named conversion, that to many among us neither heaven nor earth has any revelation till some personality touches theirs with a peculiar influence, subduing them into receptiveness. . . . [Deronda's] influence had entered into the current of that self-suspicion and self-blame which awakens a new consciousness. (Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 368; ch. 35)¹

George Eliot's last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, represents the full flowering of a theme that is present in various forms throughout almost all her fiction: the theme of moral mentoring.² The process by which a (usually female) mentee is guided to an awakening of moral consciousness by a (usually male) mentor was compelling enough for George Eliot that she wrote about virtually nothing else. (Eliot uses the term *mentor* herself in at least three passages in her novels: *Felix Holt*, Chapter 38 [313] and *Daniel Deronda*, Chapter 2 [14] and Chapter 37 [397].) As Laurence Lerner has remarked, "the psychological process which interested [Eliot] more than any other was that by which a

limited personality, whose emotional life was constricted by egotism, learns under the influence of a nobler nature to yield to more generous impulses, and transcend the bounds of self" (355). The quote from *Daniel Deronda* above encapsulates many of the subthemes that comprise the overarching mentoring theme.³ The quote's opening reference to Gwendolen Harleth's "hidden helplessness" highlights the moral crisis mentees typically experience. The moment of "hidden helplessness" occurs when the mentoring process has advanced past the stage where the mentee's resistant egotism has been broken by the "hold" the mentor has over her and the cleansing "current of self-suspicion and self-blame" has begun to flow within her. Whatever the particular circumstances may be, the mentee feels great uncertainty and confusion as to the best way to act. She turns for guidance in her crisis to the mentor, who seems to bring a new perspective, "an unknown standard," to bear on her situation. This "conversion" process involves the mentor's "subduing [the mentee] into receptiveness." In successful cases, such as Gwendolen's, the mentee's personality is drastically altered from her earlier egotistic assertiveness to a severe dependence upon the mentor which Eliot seems to find fitting and even touching. In her reverence for the bonds created between people by fellow-feeling, Eliot considers the mentoring relationship to have a religious significance. This relationship provides for the mentee a "safeguard against . . . dreaded . . . retribution"—though not from the external consequences of her actions; only from the inward doom of remaining a morally dead individual. Thus it is the awakening of a "new consciousness," brought about by the intervention of the mentor, that constitutes a new moral birth for the mentee.

All parties (the mentor, the postmentoring mentee, and the author) agree that the mentor is morally superior to the mentee. In some instances, for example, Felix Holt and Esther Lyon of *Felix Holt*, it is the mentor-to-be's criticism of the mentee-to-be which precipitates the woman's moral crisis. The man imparts to the woman strength, guidance, and knowledge, which she has found impossible to obtain anywhere else, especially from her own inner resources. This situation creates in the woman a sense of utter dependence on this one special man who alone can help her. In Victorian society a woman, as a member of the "second sex," to use Simone de Beauvoir's term, was expected to retain some of the dependence of her childhood. In some of Eliot's mentees, however, the dependence is exaggerated even by Victorian standards.

The mentor-mentee relationship thus exhibits an imbalance of power. The power is, predictably, in the hands of the male partner: he is the possessor of the wisdom of the relationship as well as, being a male in nineteenth-century Victorian society, possessing the property-holding and social-status rights of his sex.⁴ The woman's only power, ironically, is in the claim her dependence has on the man, who has agreed to be her guide. The woman's "power" thus reinforces his power by creating an opportunity for him to exercise it. Eliot conceives the man's power as moral power: the power of righteousness, upon which she places a religious value.

The mentor is, in almost all cases, a religious or moral authority figure: *Romola's* Savonarola is a Dominican monk; Mr. Tryan of "Janet's Repentance" is an Evangelical clergyman; the eponymous Daniel Deronda sets off for Jerusalem at the end of the novel, leading a Zionist community.⁵ It might appear, at first glance, that the significance of

George Eliot's having made several of her mentors religious authority figures would be in their higher degree of holiness, their closeness to God, and, therefore, their greater understanding of God's word. But, though clergymen are regular actors in the dramas of Eliot's novels, her readers must be aware that she left her own orthodox Christianity behind in her young adulthood. Eliot's most sympathetic clergymen are invariably men, like Mr. Irwine of *Adam Bede* or Mr. Farebrother or Mr. Cadwallader, both of *Middlemarch*, who leave something to be desired from the strict ecclesiastical view but who tend lovingly to their flocks of ordinary people and who are genuine humanists after George Eliot's own heart. The community is their most precious concern. Likewise, her mentors are men who are moral teachers, whose sympathy empowers them to reach out to the female mentees depending upon their guidance. Eliot, who for most of her adult life considered herself a secular humanist, substitutes loving wisdom for God as the highest good in these mentors' and mentees' lives.

Some mentors who are not specifically religious authority figures are nevertheless presented as moral authorities. This "authority" derives from their own greater moral sensibility than the people around them and is vouched for by the omniscient narrator. Felix Holt, for example, occupies no socially recognized role as an authority of any kind unless it be over the boys he instructs in the little school he runs, but within the dynamics of his relationship with Esther, he acts as a critic of the moral tenor of her life. As she first resists but later begins to accept his criticism as valid, their relationship assumes the contour of a mentor-mentee relationship.

The mentoring theme in George Eliot's novels is much entangled with one of the

ancient debates of Western thought: the battle concerning the value of the natural. Is it, as Neoplatonic Christianity maintains, something sinful and degrading that human beings should strive to overcome? Or is it, as humanism sees it, something sacred, to be nurtured and celebrated? The sacred, for the Neoplatonic incarnation of Christianity, lies above and beyond the natural—in the *transcendent* God. We are God’s creatures, and therefore possess some value, but, since the Fall, our natural lives are so mired in sin and alienation from God that we can only pray for his deliverance. The humanists’ conception of the sacred is much more as something *immanent* in the natural creation and inseparable from it, something that illuminates and ennobles nature from within. Neoplatonic Christianity, of which Calvinism is a latter-day version, is pessimistic about nature because, without God, nature is doomed/damned. Secular humanism does not go so far as to personify a divine being. Nevertheless, it optimistically accepts and affirms the natural order as being good in itself, not seeing its goodness as separable from it as in the Neoplatonic Christian view. George Eliot’s treatment of the mentoring theme reflects humanistic values insofar as she asserts the paramount importance of sympathy in mentors’ helping mentees realize that loving membership in the human community is a “nobler” state than egotistic isolation. Though her characters live in a traditional Christian setting and many are devout Christians, Eliot treats the church more as a social institution. Her focus is on the human relations within the fictional communities she has created.

A fairly early influence in Marian Evans’⁶ development as a humanist was the radical German theologian Ludwig Feuerbach. In 1854 she published her translation of

Feuerbach's 1841 work *Das Wesen Christenthums* (*The Essence of Christianity*). As she finished working on the translation, she acknowledged in a letter to her friend Sara Hennell that she had accepted Feuerbach as a mentor: "With the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree . . ." (153). These ideas, in summary, consist of a reversal of Hegel's contention in, especially, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, that Absolute Spirit objectifies itself in the material world; in other words, that the material world is a derivation of Absolute Spirit, which is primary reality. Hegel's philosophical kinship to Plato and other idealists is apparent in this concept. "Hegel, Feuerbach claimed, suffered from the inveterate tendency to treat abstract predicates as entities. . . . Having construed some attribute as the essence of human existence, Hegel then converted this attribute into an individual being, this idea into a subject" (Harvey 10). This individual being is Absolute Spirit or God. Where Hegel might make the statement that Absolute Spirit or God is just, Feuerbach used his "transformative method" to restore the attribute to its human origin. Thus it is not God but human beings that are just. Using such reasoning, Feuerbach claims to show that "the true sense of Theology is Anthropology, that there is no distinction between the *predicates* of the divine and human nature, and, consequently, no distinction between the divine and human *subject*. . ." (xvii). In this way Feuerbach establishes the philosophical grounding for his atheism.

In his analysis of Christianity, Feuerbach asserts that this form of religious expression is inherently egotistic, with its paramount concern for the welfare of the individual soul expressed in the beliefs in miracles, faith, providence, and a loving personal deity. The belief in miracles, in his view, attests to a desire to escape the constraints of nature and an

unwillingness to believe that one is a part of the natural world. Faith in a loving personal deity, whose providence is keeping watch over one at all times, exhibits most clearly the egotism which wants to believe that one's individual welfare is of supreme importance and that one is entitled to be elevated above the world of nature. Feuerbach contrasts Christianity to pagan religions, which accept the human being's place in the universe as a part of the natural world, and which, therefore, subordinate the individual to the natural whole. On the other hand, Christianity attempts to dissociate the individual from nature and to lift him or her above it.

Feuerbach's view of the natural world as humanity's proper context elaborates his objection to Hegel's penchant for abstraction. While he accepts Hegel's notion that self-consciousness comes into being when the individual becomes conscious of another,

Feuerbach insisted that the self-differentiation of the I from the Thou was mediated through a bodily encounter and not merely through consciousness. The Thou is perceived to be another because it is embodied. . . .Hegel, Feuerbach complained, always treated reality merely as a reflection of logic and of thought and, hence, could not do justice to concrete, individual existence. . . .Feuerbach's subject, by contrast, becomes aware of himself/herself in and through the encounter with an embodied, "flesh and blood," Thou. (Harvey 35-36)

Feuerbach's insistence that human beings retain and foster their birthright as members of the natural world is everywhere evident in *The Essence of Christianity*.

Such an emphasis is congruent with that of an even earlier mentor of George Eliot: William Wordsworth, the poet of nature.⁷ Wordsworth's essential humanism sees nature

as the foundation of what is good and healthful in human life. Distortion and evil enter the human sphere when the primal connection with nature is severed. The simple English peasants who populate his poetry exemplify the rightful relation between humanity and the natural world that Wordsworth envisions. Because the identity of these people is rooted in nature, they do not make the error of seeing themselves as somehow above it. Wordsworth attributes the source of this error to modern urban life rather than to Christianity as Feuerbach does some years later. Feuerbach would likely agree that Christianity, with its individualizing, egotistic trajectory, has had much to do with the development of modern urban life, characterized as it is by groups of individuals living with weakened ties both to human communities and nature. Feuerbach, in keeping with his slogan that “the true sense of Theology is Anthropology,” derives his authority for moral valuation from a truly secular humanist source: what is best in human beings. Wordsworth, on the other hand, though nominally a Christian, sees a mystical nature which acts directly as a moral teacher, a guiding spirit for human beings.

Mary Ann Evans presumably became acquainted with Wordsworth’s poetry in her school days, but she did not begin to read it avidly until around 1839, when her adolescent Evangelicalism was beginning to wear thin. On her birthday that year, she wrote to her teacher and mentor Maria Lewis, who had guided her into Evangelicalism, that in her reading of Wordsworth, “I never before met with so many of my own feelings, expressed just as I could like them.” Preceding this sentence is a statement that shows that Mary Ann is not yet ready to abandon Evangelicalism altogether: “What I could wish to have added to many of my favorite morceaux is an indication of less satisfaction in

terrene objects, a more frequent upturning of the soul's eye" (34). As an Evangelical Christian, Mary Ann cannot condone such dwelling on the creature, which dishonors the creator. Nevertheless, this pious sentiment is an ill fit in a paragraph otherwise entirely devoted to her enjoyment of Wordsworth's poetry.

Throughout her life, Marian Lewes delighted in the natural world to be met on the hours-long walks she would take almost every day. It would seem to follow that she would find a deep affinity for the works of these two authors—as, indeed, she claimed she did. However, a close look into her own works shows that George Eliot departs from the wholehearted dedication to nature that is evident in the writings of Feuerbach and Wordsworth. Eliot is in agreement with Feuerbach in his attack on Christianity's exalting the individual disproportionately, but, unlike her mentor, it is not the natural world to which she wishes to subordinate the individual; rather, it is the human community. Despite her adoption of humanism in her twenties after rejecting Christianity, George Eliot retains in her novels the urban Christian system of ethics, which does not value or even consider the natural world because it separates the human world from it and deems it (the natural world) to be of negligible worth. This system is based in a static, hierarchical cosmology called during the medieval period the Great Chain of Being, which posits fullness of being, beauty, and worth at the apex, God; entities below God in the chain are increasingly denuded of these qualities. Human beings, with white males ranking above females and males of other races, are placed close to God's height, isolated from the rest of the natural world, which is assigned to the lower regions.⁸ In Eliot's novels the mentors are generally godlike creatures elevated above their mentees in moral

superiority and ontological worth. For all the professions of love for the natural world to be found in Marian's letters (for example, "The Autumnal freshness of the mornings makes me dream of mellowing woods and gossamer threads" [Letter to Sara Hennell, Sept. 25, 1852, 57]), this love, certainly genuine on some level, coexisted with a sense that morality alone dealt with the important issues of human relations. Nature was a wonderful aesthetic experience for humans to enjoy and a resource for humans to exploit, but in itself it was not of much significance in comparison with human life. Nature existed *for* human beings to use as they saw fit. Thus in her novels Eliot focuses not on nature but on the human relations of her characters. Perhaps she can even be considered a "purer" humanist than either Feuerbach or Wordsworth in the sense that her focus is on the human world. She uses natural imagery, but often as a negative marker, to illustrate the moral obtuseness of certain characters. Her treatment of some of the mentees, especially Caterina Sarti of "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" and Hetty Sorrel of *Adam Bede*, includes this device.

The human attributes which Christianity has assigned to God both Feuerbach and Eliot want to reclaim for humanity—but for the species, not the individual. Feuerbach's objective is to make human beings realize that the qualities they most admire—once thought worthy of God alone—are human, not godlike. What Eliot does, however, is to segregate these admirable qualities in her mentor characters, thus creating a line of walking gods. Justice, compassion, wisdom, integrity—all that has traditionally been considered morally lovely—belongs to the mentors. These characters, however, do not fit Feuerbach's criterion of "flesh-and-blood" others; flesh and blood smack too much of the

natural world for Eliot's moral taste. The mentors are human beings, but their moral superiority makes them unrealistic and unbelievable. Most of the other characters—without fail, astonishingly acute portraits of human life—seem to be the morally challenged masses for whom the mentors' godlike attributes never seem attainable. Eliot's mentees represent a middle group of realistic portraits of morally low-born characters who painfully struggle to become transformed into the image of their mentors, like mermaids learning to live with the agonizing benefits of walking on legs. The realism of the mentees' portraits at the end of the mentoring process diminishes with the success of the process.

Early in the mentoring process, when Gwendolen gives her mother her jewelry to be sold to benefit their newly impoverished family, she impulsively decides to keep the necklace that she has previously pawned and that Daniel Deronda has redeemed for her. Daniel's action at the time represented for her the unwanted intrusion of a critical moral authority, and her initial reaction was resentment. The later move to keep the necklace signals clearly to the reader that Gwendolen is beginning to be drawn to Daniel as a mentor, but Gwendolen herself finds her own behavior inexplicable. Eliot comments, "There is a great deal of unmapped country within us which would have to be taken into account in an explanation of our gusts and storms" (235; ch. 24). Born in the year that George Eliot began writing fiction remarkable for its profound psychological insight (1856), Sigmund Freud became an early mapmaker charting the unknown country within. Some interesting parallels between Eliot's mentoring process and Freud's psychoanalytic technique are apparent: chiefly, that the psychoanalyst acts as a mentor to the patient in

terms of being the authority and guide in the psychoanalytic process. Furthermore, both Eliot and Freud call for a confessional element: Freud urged his patients to divulge literally everything in their conscious minds so that he could locate clues to the content and dynamics of their unconscious minds; while Eliot's confession scenes, in which the mentee trustingly lays her heart bare in the sight of her mentor, are a significant feature of many mentor-mentee relationships.

Another similarity between Eliot and Freud is the influence on both of the work of Charles Darwin. Marian Evans, by virtue of both her own interest in science and her association with her longtime companion, physiologist George Henry Lewes, was conversant with the scientific thought of the day. She accepted Darwin's theory of evolution as well as the nineteenth century's move away from philosophical metaphysics toward scientific materialism. Darwin was, in fact, an acquaintance of the Leweses, and George Henry Lewes carried on a scientific correspondence with him. As for Freud, by 1890

Darwin's influence upon Freud's scientific generation had become so extensive that Freud himself probably never knew just how much he really owed to this one intellectual source. Darwinian assumptions (1) pervaded the whole nascent discipline of child psychology from which Freud drew, and to which he in turn contributed, so much; (2) reinforced the immense importance of sexuality in the contemporary understanding of psychopathology; (3) alerted Freud and others to the manifold potentials of historical reductionism (the use of the past as a key to the present); (4) underlay Freud's fundamental conceptions of infantile erotogenic

zones, of human psychosexual stages, and of the archaic nature of the unconscious; and (5) contributed a number of major psychical concepts—like those of fixation and regression—to Freud’s overall theory of psychopathologyIt was doubtless for reasons such as these that Freud, toward the end of his life, recommended that the study of evolution be included in every prospective psychoanalyst’s program of training. (Sulloway 275-76)

Both Eliot and Freud, under the influence of Darwinian thought, were determinists. Eliot typically embodied her determinism in references in her novels to Nemesis, the Greek goddess of divine retribution. Eliot’s emphasis is consistently upon the fact that the consequences of our actions, upon ourselves and others, are ineluctable. Freud’s determinism was more extreme: “Freud’s entire life’s work in science was characterized by an abiding faith in the notion that all vital phenomena, including psychical ones, are rigidly and lawfully determined by the principle of cause and effect. . . .[He] did not believe that anything at all was truly ‘free’ in the life of the mind” (Sulloway 94-95).

This divergence between the thought of Eliot and Freud is significant for this study, which examines the bifurcation between the optimistic moral and the pessimistic medical views as well as that between the optimistic humanistic and pessimistic Christian views, mentioned above. Despite her professed humanism, Eliot’s thinking was characterized by a conjoining of the pessimistic Christian view and the optimistic moral view. Freud’s, on the contrary, linked the pessimistic medical view with an “optimistic” humanistic view. Eliot was pessimistic about what she saw as human nature left to its own devices: she believed that an unregenerate egotism is the natural mental outlook of human beings.

However, she was optimistic about the effect of a moral education upon human beings in their egotistic “state of nature.” The mentoring narratives stand as a testament to this belief, which reaches beyond optimism to attain the character of a religious conviction. Freud, on the other hand, took a more neutral medical view, declining to make moral judgments about the id. However, he concurred with Eliot’s pessimistic view that the id is savage and self-serving. Considering this, it may be stretching a point to assert that the saturnine Freud was in any way “optimistic” about humanity. Nevertheless, a qualified or technical optimism can be seen in his humanistic willingness to accept the primal, amoral character of the id. He accepted humanity the way he found it. His judgment of the id, therefore, was medical, not moral. Freud believed that, through the psychoanalytic process, a patient could bring to consciousness certain of his or her psychic conflicts and resolve them, thereby reaching a greater degree of functionality. Nevertheless, the basic structure of the psyche was immutably determined. (“Ids will be ids” seems to have been his attitude.) Freud’s pessimism, in line with that of the modernists (of whom he can be considered a prime exponent), inhered in his belief that, despite the strenuous effort called civilization that human beings had undertaken to tame their powerful, shadowy ids, such a task was insurmountable. Civilized humanity would always be in thrall to the biologically determined id; any “refinement” or “ennoblement” we achieve is psychic veneer. Such concepts, indeed, only indicated we are laboring under social self-delusions.

George Eliot would have greeted both Freud’s pessimism and his optimism with dismay. She, like many liberal thinkers of the nineteenth century, was a meliorist.

Politically conservative, she nevertheless believed in the possibility of gradual change, especially as brought about by education. Such a belief explains her contribution to the fund raised for the establishment of Girton College, Cambridge, the first women's college in England, despite the fact that her views on "the Woman Question" remained largely traditional. Underlying Eliot's presentation of the mentoring relationships is the assumption that the mentees can change their mental state and their behavior by making a conscious choice under the guidance of their mentors. That the choice will entail a long, painful process she does not shrink from and, in fact, stresses. Eliot draws on the Christian virtue of self-abnegation for the solution to the mentees' egotism. A mentee's conversion in a George Eliot novel very much resembles a prototypical Christian conversion. The mentee's sin of egotism is arrested by the moral judgment of the mentor. This intervention, when the mentee finally gives up her initial resistance, leads to confession, amendment of life, and the miracle of transformation. In this way, Eliot believed, true human ennoblement can be achieved as her successful mentees, notably Gwendolen and Esther, demonstrate. Eliot, as a nominal humanist, has eliminated all trace of transcendence from her fictional versions of the conversion experience. Nevertheless, the religious overtones of these mentoring narratives are clearly audible to the reader.

Freud, a truer humanist even than Eliot in his acceptance if not celebration of humanity, would have nothing to do with a religiously based interpretation of reality. He understood religion instead as a cultural product of the process of sublimation. Therefore, self-abnegation was simply another attempt on the part of the ego, at the

instigation of the superego, to force the id into submission. The psychoanalytic process, unlike the mentoring process, presumes not sin, for which a human being can be held accountable, but illness, which is the inevitable result of the ineffectual attempt on the part of the ego and superego to gain total control over the id. This process follows a sequence from illness to the seeking of treatment to diagnosis to analysis to recovery. Recovery consists of the patient's having achieved healthier mental functioning: a balance between conscious and unconscious without recourse to neurosis. Recovery is never fully complete because the dualistic conflict between the id and the other parts of the psyche is an unchangeable fact of life. A mentally ill person needs the guidance of the psychoanalyst to achieve clinical recovery, but the capacity to bring about total recovery is beyond the skill of any psychoanalyst.⁹ Freud's understanding of the force of the unconscious would have made Eliot's optimistic trust in the ability of conscious choice to effect profound change seem laughable to him.

Freud's tripartite psychological schema accounts for greater complexity in the psyche than traditional Christian thought has recognized with its crude body-soul split. The soul, conceived of as the best part of a human being, is, perhaps, expressed most fully in psychoanalytic terms by the ego ideal.¹⁰ Freud's early term, later subsumed in the term *superego*, refers to a person's ideal vision of himself or herself; it represents the kind of person one thinks one ought to be. But the ego and the id share space in the human skull with the ego ideal (or superego). Freud's entire psychoanalytic theory rests on the dualistic assumption that these psychic functions tend not to act in harmony with each other. In other words, there is no monolithic self—or soul—smoothly commanding its

body—as a human being might ride a horse. Granted, Christianity allows for psychic conflict in the concepts of sin and temptation. But the personification of evil in the figure of the Devil reveals an externalization: the Devil tempts the soul; the soul either resists or succumbs to this action from outside the psyche. The psychoanalytic model, on the other hand, by internalizing psychic conflict, paradoxically manages to avoid the body-soul or body-psyche split. This is accomplished specifically by the function of the id, which is the aspect of the psyche most closely aligned with the body. The id voices the body's desires and does battle for them, if necessary, with the ego and superego. This close connection between the body and the psyche enables psychoanalytic theory to sidestep the body-soul split which has poisoned the relation between human beings and nature in the Christian perspective.

To look back at George Eliot through the lens provided by Freud is to locate that point of difference which divides the Victorians from ourselves. In this study I will use Freudian tools to analyze the mentoring relationships, specifically the process which the mentees undergo. While the depth of George Eliot's psychological presentation of her characters is prodigious, her persistent moral concerns about what the mentees *should* be, coupled with her dismissiveness about what they are, create some difficulty for the modern reader in the pursuit of understanding these characters. Psychological analysis, which for readers in the early twenty-first century has been irrevocably altered by Freud, is for many today the most "natural" way to interpret the world. Viewing Eliot's nineteenth-century mentoring narratives from the standpoint of the great psychologist of the twentieth century will help her readers gain fresh insight into these moral/religious

tales.

The healthy conscious psyche is one in which the ego is the dominant component while the superego and id play complementary subordinate roles. (Though the id is dominant in the sense of existing mostly outside the conscious control of the ego, it is the role of the ego to maintain balance between itself and the other parts of the psyche.) Psychic boundaries are intact, but the self is inwardly motivated to maintain shared connection with others. The self is balanced between secure self-grounding and the mutual support and stimulation of meaningful contact with others. In such a state the self's vitality and authenticity can flourish, leading to a sense of well-being.

George Eliot's mentees begin with unhealthy psyches: they are egotists whose pleasure-seeking, self-gratifying ids are dominant in their personalities.¹¹ Even more damning, from Eliot's point of view, is the defense mechanism which allows for only minimal connection with others. The mentees develop this defense mechanism to protect a fragile self-esteem and consequent weak ego boundaries. These mentees' primary concern is self. They are imprisoned within the walls of their own selfish psyches. To continue the imprisonment analogy, the mentor appears as a rescuing prince figure, who will release the enchanted princess from her psychic bonds. It is the mentor's moral teaching and example which enable the mentee to undergo the process of becoming a moral person. In Freudian terms this means the dominance of the personality is shifted to the superego. The mentee's primary concern now becomes the moral imperative of sympathetic service to others. Just as Gwendolen Harleth at the beginning of *Daniel Deronda* is certainly one of George Eliot's supreme egotists, at the end of the novel, she

represents Eliot's stellar example of moral transformation.

George Eliot presents the newly transformed mentee to her readers as a victory won for morality by the mentor. Unfortunately, her intention backfires, especially in the case of Gwendolen. Most readers today prefer and, I suspect, even some contemporary readers preferred the Gwendolen of the earlier part of *Daniel Deronda*, before that redoubtable hero has had a chance to catch her in his moral talons. The early Gwendolen has an insouciant vivacity which delights the reader while her later timid aims at moral correctness fall with a tinny clatter. In Barbara Hardy's words, "[Gwendolen Harleth] is one of those great characters in fiction whose vitality comes off the page like a blast of life" (25). The psychic source of Gwendolen's earlier vitality is her dominant id. The dominance of her id accounts for her egotism, but the id also is the part of the psyche that governs enjoyment, desire, motivation, and will. The id is the source of her zest for living. Once Gwendolen has graduated with honors from the moral academy presided over by Daniel, her id has effectively been squelched and, along with it, the bright vitality of her personality.

Gwendolen's ego, the adult "I" of her psyche, has also been diminished by the mentoring process. From a brash self-confidence in the early part of the novel, Gwendolen moves to a state of near-paralysis, in which she looks to Daniel for guidance in the smallest of decisions.¹² It is true that at the end Daniel has begun the weaning process; he is leaving England and Gwendolen, and she must now make her own decisions. But with a cruel, self-lashing superego now dominant, Gwendolen's ego as well as her id are muted in their functions. The result of this stifling of the ego is a loss of

authenticity. Gwendolen no longer has any grounding within herself. Her earlier personality was flawed in part by exclusive defensive grounding in herself. However, the result of Daniel's moral education program has been to overcorrect the earlier imbalance so that a different one now exists in its place.

George Eliot considers these depredations on the mentee's personality to be the requisite price to be paid for her to attain the state of true sympathy with others. What George Eliot is calling sympathy, however, can more aptly be termed self-abnegating empathy. In this state, the trained mentee engages in a severe denial of the worthiness and integrity of self, effectively violating the psychic boundary, which in normal functioning defines and protects the self but which in an egotist's psyche is already frail. This violation of the psychic boundary is a prime cause of the loss of authenticity discussed above. Once the boundary has been damaged, the distinction between self and other is blurred and enmeshment occurs in the mentee's relationships with others. George Eliot's pre-Freudian perspective did not allow her to recognize this dynamic; she saw this, rather, as a praiseworthy expression of her Christian-derived moral ethic.

Viewed in reverse chronological order, three of George Eliot's major mentees—Gwendolen Harleth, Esther Lyon, and Romola de' Bardi—fall on a continuum from unhealthiest psyche to healthiest psyche, from most dependent on the mentor to least dependent. Gwendolen's and Esther's psyches are unhealthy in their defensive need to overprotect their ego boundaries. As a result, these two characters are vain, shallow, and self-centered. Romola, on the other hand, begins where Gwendolen and Esther end. Her concerns are not psychic but spiritual. At the beginning of the novel, she is living a life

of service to her father, a fact which indicates that her ego is grounded solidly enough that she has no need for the defensive self-protection that produces egotism. She has already achieved a level of sublimation which allows her to serve another's needs, reasonably suppressing and transforming some of her desires without neglecting her own crucial needs. Nevertheless, she is aware of other unfilled spiritual needs. Savonarola's attraction for her as a mentor is that he can guide her in the filling of these needs. Under his mentorship Romola is able to attain a sympathy which reaches beyond her immediate family circle to embrace others, who represent humanity as a whole. The independence she eventually achieves from her mentor enables Romola to maintain her psychic health and integrity by resisting the move from sympathy to unboundaried empathy.

Encountering a character whose unfulfilled needs are spiritual rather than psychic, we reach the end of the line with Freud. His answer to such a situation would be to reduce the so-called spiritual needs to his psychological schema, to explain them away in psychological terms. To treat the spiritual seriously, we must turn to a psychologist who incorporates the spiritual as a legitimate part of the experience of human beings, not merely as a delusion explainable by other psychological factors. Carl Gustav Jung, a one-time disciple of Freud, is perhaps the foremost advocate of such an approach. J. J. Clarke remarks that Jung "rejected the modern tendency to reduce mind to purely physical processes, and while arguing that the roots of the psyche are firmly planted in physical nature, he constructed a model of the human psyche which also found a place for the need for some higher purpose and spiritual fulfilment" (xiv). I will draw on Jung's thought in my treatment of Romola.

In Chapter 2 I begin my analysis of the mentoring relationships with the Felix-Esther relationship of *Felix Holt*. In this novel Eliot reveals with special clarity a striking polarity in her Christian-derived thinking about moral values. Felix the mentor is presented in terms of valorized substance (“greatness,” “nobility”) while Esther’s morally impoverished state is described in terms of diminished substance and value (“triviality,” “narrowness,” “selfishness”). This polarity is central to understanding the mentoring relationships; in her fictional embodiments Eliot continues the battle over the value of the natural, extending the centuries-long debate between Neoplatonic Christianity and secular humanism. In addition, in this chapter I introduce some of the diagnostic categories of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition, for the purpose of my psychological analysis of Esther.

In Chapter 3 I undertake a Freudian analysis of the process that Gwendolen undergoes as a mentee. Gwendolen is most suited to be used as a psychological “case study” because Eliot’s treatment of her as a mentee is more comprehensively developed than her presentation of any other mentee. Gwendolen never quite recovers from the crushing her spirit suffers in realizing her moral limitations during the course of her mentoring; thus, she clings more tightly to Daniel than ever. At the end of the novel, she is forced to let go as Daniel is leaving to pursue his own life’s goals. Gwendolen is left a pathetic, frightened remnant of her formerly spirited self, a victim to her profound dependence upon her mentor. Instead of restoring her to psychological health, the mentoring process has transformed Gwendolen’s previous mental malady from Narcissistic Personality Disorder to another, equally maladaptive state: Dependent Personality Disorder.

I consider two early minor examples of the mentor-mentee relationship in Chapter 4: Maynard Gilfil-Caterina Sarti and Edgar Tryan-Janet Dempster in “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story” and “Janet’s Repentance” of *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Both of these early mentor-mentee relationships exhibit characteristics which anticipate the final relationship, Daniel-Gwendolen, more closely than any of the relationships that are found in the intervening works. Thus Eliot comes virtually full circle, beginning and ending with mentoring relationships in which the mentee capitulates to the mentor in full dependence. In the intervening works, the mentees maintain or achieve some degree of independence. In *Daniel Deronda*, however, Eliot returns to her original pattern, elaborating and extending it.

Chapter 5 focuses on three relationships which involve one or more prominent variations on the mentoring theme: Dinah Morris-Hetty Sorrel of *Adam Bede*, Mary Garth-Fred Vincy of *Middlemarch*, and Dolly Winthrop-Silas Marner of *Silas Marner*. I have grouped these three relationships together in this chapter because all involve either a gender shift or reversal. Dinah-Hetty of *Adam Bede* is a same-sex mentor-mentee relationship. Dinah and Hetty share this relationship only in Hetty’s last days in prison. All three of these relationships boast female mentors, the last two teamed with male mentees. Eliot treats the pathetic sight of a man who needs mentoring as a subject for comedy. In *Silas Marner* comedy is stretched to the extent of parody because the female mentor, Dolly, who is well-meaning but addleheaded, patently lacks the wisdom the “serious” mentors bring to their tasks. The Dinah-Hetty relationship from *Adam Bede* further develops George Eliot’s battle against the natural. Hetty, associated imagistically

with nature, retains the dubious title of one of Eliot's foremost narcissists while Dinah is apotheosized into a spiritual being who has transcended all that is earthly. The Mary-Fred relationship brings in Feuerbachian themes, Fred representing Feuerbach's egotistic Christian man. *Silas Marner's* parodic mentoring relationship is exceptional among all the rest in Eliot's canon, for this novel's idyllic rural setting allows her, in a manner closer to Wordsworth and Feuerbach, to imagine a mentee who has simply lost his way and who can be restored to fullness of life without the need for moral transformation.

The Mill on the Floss, which is the subject of Chapter 6, presents another significant variation on the mentoring theme. Maggie Tulliver is a mentee who is better equipped morally to be a mentor than any of her mentors. Nevertheless, Maggie has not one but three mentors and two antimentors: Thomas à Kempis, Philip Wakem, and Dr. Kenn are her mentors; her brother Tom and Stephen Guest her antimentors. She survives the failures of her mentors and the damages done by her antimentors, questing to recover a cherished past. This quest, which I read as a regressive refusal to grow, brings disaster into Maggie's life, represented by the great flood which ends both her life and the novel.

Besides the Mary-Fred relationship, discussed in Chapter 5, *Middlemarch* contains two failed mentor-mentee relationships: Edward Casaubon-Dorothea Brooke and Tertius Lydgate-Rosamond Vincy. These two relationships I appraise in Chapter 7. Whereas the Mary-Fred relationship presents a comic distortion of the standard mentoring relationship, the other two illustrate the tragedy of human beings unable to connect meaningfully with each other. In the Casaubon-Dorothea relationship Dorothea urgently wants a mentor, but Casaubon fails her while still attempting to control her after his death by means of his

will and instructions he has left her to carry on his scholarly project in futility. Dorothea, whose disillusionment with her mentor has been building throughout their marriage, balks at the prospect of having to serve him after his death. Finally at that point she becomes independent of him.¹³ In the Lydgate-Rosamond relationship Lydgate wants to be a mentor, but only in the sense that he considers it the province of a husband to instruct his wife so that she can create for him a domestic heaven. He is not genuinely interested in Rosamond's growth as a person. For her part, Rosamond refuses from the start to be a mentee in any way, shape, or form. She insists on being independent of Lydgate, remaining truly untouched by his influence. I consider these mentoring failures in the context of the pessimism of the novel as a whole.

Like Dorothea, Romola, whom I discuss in Chapter 8, breaks away from her failed mentor Savonarola and becomes independent. Of all the mentees except Maggie, Romola is least in need of a mentor. She is in need of a deeper spiritual life, which Savonarola's Christianity is able to give her. Unlike George Eliot's English mentees, Romola, the fifteenth-century Florentine woman, represents her creator's fantasy woman: she is free to be herself in a society more accepting of strong women than the society in which Eliot herself found her home.

Chapter 9 contains my concluding remarks: a summary of the major themes of this work and some extensions of those themes. In particular, I ponder the question of why Eliot found the mentoring theme to be so artistically compelling. In her understanding of the purpose of art, Eliot tried initially but unsuccessfully to combine an adherence to realism with a moralist's drive to reshape the reality she encounters. Eliot's mentoring

narratives leave little doubt of her ultimate allegiance. Finally, I examine the significance of the mentoring pattern for twenty-first century readers of George Eliot.

Additionally, I provide an appendix in which I examine the relationships in which Marian Evans herself was a mentee or a mentor. Her personal mentors were her father Robert Evans, her older brother Isaac Evans, her teacher Maria Lewis, and her friends Charles and Caroline (Cara) Bray, Sara Hennell, and Dr. Robert Brabant. Maria Lewis, who introduced Mary Anne to Evangelical Christianity, acted as her spiritual mentor and was also her first intellectual mentor. The Brays and Sara Hennell were intellectual mentors as she moved from Christianity to humanism. The relationship with Dr. Brabant took place when Mary Ann was twenty-two and fits the mentor-mentee pattern found in the novels more closely than the other relationships from her earlier life. Long-distance intellectual mentors whose works profoundly influenced Mary Ann include Wordsworth and Ludwig Feuerbach, introduced above, and also Charles Hennell, Charles Bray, and David Friedrich Strauss. In later life, Marian assumed the role of mentor to several admiring younger friends. I will focus on her mentoring relationships with Maria Congreve; Elma Stuart; Alexander Main; Edith Simcox; and John Cross, whom Mary Ann married in the last year of her life.

NOTES

¹ I will cite all quotations from Eliot's fiction by page and chapter number.

² See Sally Shuttleworth's discussion of "social organicism" in *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: the Make-Believe of a Beginning* as a view of society held by Eliot and others. Shuttleworth writes, "Victorian social theorists replaced the atomistic social ideas of the eighteenth century with images of organic interdependence, and subordinated the revolutionary insistence on individual rights to more 'wholesome' considerations of social duty" (x). She quotes from Eliot's late essay "The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!" to give a clear demonstration of these organicist values. Eliot states, "Our dignity and rectitude are proportioned to our sense of relationship with something great, admirable, pregnant with high possibilities, worthy of sacrifice, a continual inspiration to self-repression and discipline by the presentation of aims larger and more attractive to our generous part than the securing of ease or prosperity" (139). Shuttleworth's aim and my own intersect at the point of these values, which she terms social organicist and which I identify as the moral values that Eliot's mentors are working to instill in their mentees. Shuttleworth proceeds to trace the philosophical and scientific antecedents of George Eliot's thought. On the other hand, I pursue the theological line of descent, coupling with it a psychological analysis of the effects of Eliot's theologically derived moral values on her mentee characters. Though beyond the scope of this study, an exploration of further connections among the scientific, philosophical, and theological foundations of Eliot's thought as it informs her fiction would likely prove an illuminating contribution to the

existing body of scholarship.

³ The mentor-mentee “pattern” in George Eliot’s works is a set of characteristics extrapolated from all the mentoring narratives. Only the Daniel-Gwendolen relationship contains all the characteristics; the others contain different combinations of the standard characteristics, sometimes with variations. I do not discuss in this study every mentoring relationship found in Eliot’s fiction; rather, I have chosen the ones I consider to be most representative and most prominent.

⁴ Before 1881, when the Married Woman’s Property Act was passed, any property a woman owned reverted by law to her husband upon marriage.

⁵ In one of the three instances in which the mentor is female—Dinah Morris in her relationship to Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*—Dinah is, for the time being, a religious authority figure as a Methodist lay preacher. Another female mentor, Mary Garth in *Middlemarch*, does not hold a corresponding role, but she is clearly the moral authority in her relationship with Fred Vincy. The third, Dolly Winthrop in *Silas Marner*, is an exception: her lack of the authority that mentors generally possess is a major part of the parody of the mentoring relationship that Eliot is presenting in this novel.

⁶ I have followed Gordon Haight in using the spelling variant of George Eliot’s given name that she was using at the period in her life I happen to discussing: “Mary Anne Evans” from birth through age 17, “Mary Ann Evans” from ages 18 through 30, “Marian Evans” from ages 31 through 34, “Marian Lewes” from ages 35 through 59, and “Mary Ann Cross” from age 60 to her death. Haight’s name usage becomes inconsistent once

the pseudonym “George Eliot” appears on the scene early in 1857. He appears to use “George Eliot” and “Marian Lewes” interchangeably. I will use “George Eliot” for references to her in her profession as author, saving “Marian Lewes” for personal references.

⁷ For a helpful discussion of George Eliot’s affinity for and use of Wordsworth in her fiction, see Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, pp.145-67.

⁸ The following verses from Psalm 8 provide an example of this hierarchical theology with significant implications for imperialism:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!

.....

When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,

the moon and the stars which thou hast established;

what is man that thou art mindful of him,

and the son of man that thou dost care for him?

Yet thou hast made him little less than God,

and dost crown him with glory and honor.

Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;

thou hast put all things under his feet,

all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,

whatever passes along the paths of the sea. (8.1, 3-8; RSV; italics added)

⁹ For further discussion of the extent of the “cure” Freud believed psychoanalysis could provide, see Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time*, pp. 299-305.

¹⁰ See Freud’s discussion of the ego ideal in “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” pp. 94-95.

¹¹ An “id-dominated psyche” can only be literally descriptive of children under the age of two years, whose egos and superegos are not yet fully formed. By using this term for these adult mentees, I mean to imply a pathological state of imbalance in which the ego and the superego do not maintain a sufficient harmonious balance with the id.

¹² In the early part of the novel, the cosmic agoraphobia the usually fearless Gwendolen experiences is a deft psychological touch on the part of George Eliot in laying the groundwork for the mentor-mentee relationship of the later part of the book. It indicates a chink in Gwendolen’s psychological armor, a dim awareness not yet admitted to herself that she is fallible, vulnerable, and in need of guidance. This awareness opens up later into a willingness to accept a mentor’s direction.

¹³ The same characterization can be made of Savonarola-Romola. The difference, however, is that Savonarola, unlike Casaubon, is a true mentor for a time despite his faults and his ultimate betrayal of Romola. Casaubon is a mentor only in Dorothea’s fantasy.

CHAPTER 2

FELIX HOLT THE MENTOR: A MORAL GOD

Felix Holt's Esther Lyon neither rebels and escapes from her mentor as, for instance, Romola does, nor clings to him with the desperation to which Gwendolen is impelled. Esther is an "average" mentee. In many ways the relationship between Esther and Felix is depicted with greater explicitness, in part because Felix is less refined and therefore more direct than the other mentors. This fact results in a particular clarity of exposition. Furthermore, in comparison with the more elaborated mentor-mentee narrative in *Daniel Deronda*, the Felix-Esther story is told with greater simplicity. Thus a preliminary examination of the mentoring relationship in *Felix Holt* can bring the phenomenon into particularly clear focus.

The passage which contains the first meeting between Esther and Felix includes an image that emblemizes the future significance of the mentoring relationship to be formed between the two characters. Felix is visiting Mr. Lyon, who has invited him to have tea with him and his daughter. As he stands up to go to the tea table, "Felix pushed back his chair too suddenly against the rickety table close by him, and down went [Esther's] blue-frilled work-basket, a small sealed bottle of attar of rose, and something heavier than these—a duodecimo volume [of Byron's poetry]. . ." (61; ch. 5). This rough young man has come crashing into Esther's life and will shortly begin to upset all that she cares for—elegance, refinement, vanity, romance—by knocking over its fragile support. In fact, Felix immediately begins his initial criticism of his mentee-to-be by challenging

her admiration for Byron and pronouncing him a “misanthropic debauchee . . . [whose] corsairs and renegades . . . Alps and Manfreds, are the most paltry puppets that were ever pulled by the strings of lust and pride” (62; ch. 5).

The only resistance to Felix’s attack that Esther offers at this early stage is clever repartee. When he asks her to “justify” her taste in a poet he considers so morally insidious, she replies, “I should not attempt [the justification] with you, Mr Holt. . . . You have such strong words at command, that they make the smallest argument seem formidable. If I had ever met the giant Cormoran, I should have made a point of agreeing with him in his literary opinions” (62; ch. 5). In these quotes we can identify the terms of a polarity of images that this scene is rife with: the massive and substantial, by which Felix is represented, and the miniscule and frivolous, by which the prementoring Esther is described. Felix is associated with the giant Cormoran and with “clearing a forest” (64; ch. 5) (implying the necessary brawn), “the business of life” (64; ch. 5) (implying important purposes and concerns), and “enlargement” (65; ch. 5). He is “massively built” and has “large clear grey eyes and full lips” (61; ch. 5). By contrast, Esther, whom Felix instantly sniffs out as a “fine lady” (60; ch. 5), is described as making “graceful little turns of the head” (62; ch. 5) and as having small feet (60; ch. 5). She is associated with small items, such as the rickety table, the small volume of Byron, the small bottle of attar of rose, and even tweezers (64; ch. 5) as well as “small airs and small notions” (64; ch. 5) and several small animals: a mouse (54; ch. 5), a squirrel (64; ch. 5), and “intelligent fleas” (66; ch. 5). Esther does manage a jab at Felix within this massive-miniscule idiom. In the giant Cormoran quote above, she implies that the burly bluster of

Felix's words may only be a cover for an insignificant line of reasoning. But Esther cannot match the strength of Felix's opposition for long. He will overcome her self-defense almost too rapidly to make the conquest convincing. During this first conversation he begins to prepare his attack with an internal comment on her: "[a] peacock! . . . I should like to come and scold her every day, and make her cry and cut her fine hair off" (65; ch. 5). (Note Felix's application to Esther of the standard image of vanity: the peacock.) As he leaves the house, he thinks, "I could grind my teeth at such self-satisfied minxes, who think they can tell everybody what is the correct thing, and the utmost stretch of their ideas will not place them on a level with the intelligent fleas. I should like to see if she could be made ashamed of herself" (66; ch. 5). The mentor is prepared for his self-appointed role.

The two groups of images discussed above are prejudicial insofar as they are George Eliot's way of directing the reader's sympathies to the qualities that she considers valuable: Felix's representation of all that is grand in life, which she depicts with the images of the massive. Esther's false values, on the other hand, are shown to be petty and trivial by their being rendered as small and insubstantial. Eliot presents Esther as a woman who cares nothing for the "larger" concerns of life—great issues of humanity, morality, religion, politics, history; in short, anything that involves the welfare of the larger community. Her interests run more to the refinements of taste, fashion, and good breeding:

[S]he was alive to the finest shades of manner, to the nicest distinctions of tone and accent; she had a little code of her own about scents and colours, textures and

behaviour, by which she secretly condemned or sanctioned all things and persons. And she was well satisfied with herself for her fastidious taste, never doubting that hers was the highest standard. She was proud that the best-born and handsomest girls at school had always said that she might be taken for a born lady. Her own pretty instep, clad in a silk stocking, her little heel, just rising from a kid slipper, her irreproachable nails and delicate wrist, were the objects of delighted consciousness to her; and she felt that it was her superiority which made her unable to use without disgust any but the finest cambric handkerchiefs and freshest gloves. Her money all went in the gratification of these nice tastes, and she saved nothing from her earnings. (68-69; ch. 6)

Esther equates her refined sensibilities with a superiority which might have been attributed to high birth. She is unaware until much later in the novel that she actually does come from a noble French family on her mother's side and a genteel English family on her father's; early in the novel she simply considers herself a refined exception to the norm within the Nonconforming class of shopkeepers in which she has been raised.

Esther's vanity is not more pronounced than that of most young women in their early twenties, nor is she extremely selfish. The previous quote shows a self-contentment in Esther that Eliot evidently condemns as self-absorption. Despite this Esther is shown to be affectionate to her father, supplying his occasional wants "with some pretty device of a surprise" (69; ch. 6). However, to George Eliot's and Felix Holt's view, any such affection is suspect if it coexists with interests which they would consider trifling. Eliot makes a point to demonstrate how much more loving to her father Esther becomes under

the influence of Felix's mentoring. In such a way does Eliot focus on what she sees as Esther's original underlying self-centeredness. While Esther's vanity is certainly taken notice of by the gossiping ladies of Mr. Lyon's chapel, it is Felix who reacts to it as a personal affront:

"I want you to see that the creature who has the sensibilities that you call taste, and not the sensibilities that you call opinions, is simply a lower, pettier sort of being—an insect that notices the shaking of the table, but never notices the thunder. . . . You have enough understanding to make it wicked that you should add one more to the women who hinder men's lives from having any nobleness in them. . . . I want you to change." (107-08; ch. 10)

Felix makes this statement to Esther after an acquaintance of merely a few weeks. The combined insult and demand which he thrusts upon her here is explained by Eliot as a result of his blunt eccentricity. As one of the few working-class mentors in Eliot's fiction, Felix has a directness of manner and expression that the higher-bred mentors' gentility precludes. As a result, Eliot allows him a license in his behavior which is rewarded by acceptance and affection by such characters as Mr. Lyon and, not too long in following, Esther herself.

For the moment, Esther reacts at first with understandable indignation at the liberty Felix has taken with her; neither does she scruple to tell him so. Felix's defense of his outspokenness resembles an image Daniel Deronda proffers—much more decorously—to Gwendolen Harleth. The following is Felix's version: "'Yes, I suppose I should have been taking a liberty if I had tried to drag you back by the skirt when I saw you running

into a pit” (110; ch. 10). Felix thus justifies his rude intrusion into Esther’s inner life by posing his concern in terms of a moral emergency. When quick action is needed in order to save life, ordinary social codes are suspended; a man is even excused by the danger of the situation for touching a woman in ways that normally only intimacy would allow. The woman’s only proper response in such a situation is gratitude. Esther cannot manage gratitude at this early point; her mind is a turmoil of pain, anger, and mortification at the wounds Felix has given her and incipient guilt in the dawning consciousness that he may be right.

Esther is entering an “epoch,” a term Eliot uses repeatedly to describe the new widening of vision that her mentees receive with the help of their mentors. The experience of an epoch is similar to the fall of the rickety table in the image discussed at the beginning of the chapter. The mentee’s world is overturned by the force of a new influence, whose bases of understanding and corresponding values differ radically from the shaky “legs” she has rested her life upon up to this point. The first shock is in realizing that the mentor’s viewpoint, with its implicit—or, especially in Felix’s case, explicit—challenge to her own, might have some validity. The mentee’s confidence rather quickly deteriorates; she begins to believe she may in fact be wrong, injurious, selfish, or whatever the mentor sees fit to accuse her of. She feels intense mortification because of the blame the mentor has cast on her. Inevitably, however, she perceives the idea “There is another way!” as the beginning of the process of freeing herself—always, except in the cases of Romola and Maggie, with the mentor’s help and supervision—from the narrowness of soul her mentor has convinced her she possesses.

On Esther's part the incipient willingness to change is spurred by a covert motive: it is predicated on the prospect of being loved by Felix. This is evident in her first movement towards capitulation after her initial outrage at the freedom of Felix's behavior:

She revolted against his assumption of superiority, yet she felt herself in a new kind of subjection to him. He was ill-bred, he was rude, he had taken an unwarrantable liberty; yet his indignant words were a tribute to her: he thought she was worth more pains than the women of whom he took no notice. . . .[D]id he love her one little bit, and was that the reason why he wanted her to change?

Esther felt less angry at that form of freedom. . . . (110; ch. 10)

To gain intimacy with a woman, a lover's freedom crosses the barriers social convention erects between people. Being a respectable woman, Esther must wait for a lover to come to her—a well-known feature of nineteenth-century English life. But the fact that she would entertain a desire for intimacy—flickering here but quickly to grow stronger—with a man who has treated her with unstinting verbal abuse reveals an important feature of her personality. This feature is a self-esteem so low that Esther will tolerate the abuse in order to gain the “protection” of an intimate relationship with this man. The moderate level of vanity Esther presents at the beginning of the novel is a narcissistic personality trait though it is not maladaptive enough to be considered a part of Narcissistic Personality Disorder as defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) (661). When Esther has completed the mentoring process, she exhibits some traits of a dependent personality, but, again, none of them is

severe enough to warrant a diagnosis of Dependent Personality Disorder (*DSM-IV* 668). Her willingness to tolerate abuse for the sake of gaining the relationship as demonstrated above is the first dependent trait that Esther exhibits and is a signal that she is beginning to accept the mentoring process. The reduction of Esther's moderate grandiosity to a state of more culturally acceptable submission is the result George Eliot is aiming for in the mentoring process. Esther presents a mild introduction to the saga that Gwendolen Harleth undergoes in *Daniel Deronda*. As discussed in Chapter 3, Gwendolen exhibits a full-blown example of Narcissistic Personality Disorder at the beginning of the novel; the mentoring process transmutes this into full-blown Dependent Personality Disorder. The focus for the present chapter, however, is George Eliot's concern that Esther arrive at a state culturally approved for a woman.

In the final pages of the novel, just after Esther has accepted Felix's proposal of marriage, they exchange these words:

"I'm a rough, severe fellow, Esther. Shall you never repent?—never be inwardly reproaching me that I was not a man who could have shared your wealth? Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure!" said Esther, shaking her head; "for then I should have honoured you less. I am weak—my husband must be greater and nobler than I am." (397; ch. 51)

Esther's words seem to be spoken by a person with Dependent Personality Disorder, but her confident tone and cocky gesture do not fit the generally anxious subservience typical of the demeanor of people with this disorder (*DSM-IV* 665-66). Dorothea Barrett

describes Esther's submission to Felix in this scene as characterized by "abject slavishness" (113); such a reading, however, does not seem to take the tone of the scene into account. Despite her words Esther still functions quite independently: it is her own decision to give up her claim on the Transome estate and inheritance, to refuse Harold's offer of marriage, and to return to her old life. Persons with Dependent Personality Disorder are not capable of making even minor decisions with that degree of assurance and independence (*DSM-IV* 665). Esther's perky tone in the quote above seems to reveal a secure self-confidence that her words belie.

How to reconcile, then, this apparent self-confidence with the low self-esteem that has led Esther to accept a relationship with an abuser? The key is in Esther's last sentence in the passage quoted above: "'I am weak—my husband must be greater and nobler than I am.'" It is her low self-esteem that causes Esther to characterize herself as "'weak'." Esther is not weaker than any other woman presented in the novel; in fact, she is arguably the strongest. Lyddy and Mrs. Holt are comic figures; they are characterized respectively as doleful and whiny. Mrs. Transome is bowed down by the weight of her tragic life. Esther is pointedly presented as the ministering angel who brings this older woman comfort. Nevertheless, Eliot makes a point of showing that Felix considers Esther weak: "Felix felt for Esther's pain as the strong soldier, who can march on hungering without fear that he shall faint, feels for the young brother—the maiden-cheeked conscript whose load is too heavy for him" (263; ch. 33). The emphasis in this image rests on the physical weakness of women relative to men. It is Esther's status *as a woman*—the subordinate sex—that constitutes her weakness, which is a moral weakness

as symbolized by her physical weakness. Now that she has found the “protection” a man can give her in marriage, she can feel a paradoxically confident abjection that is grounded in her trust in the man’s strength. She has learned the lessons of her mentoring well. Thus she states that her husband must be “‘greater and nobler’” than she is; if he were only as good as she, he would be contemptible and the “protection” he offers a mere sham.

Now that Esther has arrived at the point of marriage, well mentored by her husband-to-be, she is safe inside the cultural fold. Eliot can declare a moral victory for her social conservatism. Esther’s self-confidence as well as her self-glorifying narcissistic personality traits have been purged by the mentoring process. Now her focus is towards others, towards the community she is a part of. She no longer trusts herself; instead, she has boundless confidence in her husband, the patriarchal system personified. She has become the kind of woman the culture sanctions in the interest of its own preservation: a woman who will renounce herself gladly for the sake of others. The “new kind of subjection” (110; ch. 10) that binds Esther to Felix is not so new after all.

Esther refuses Harold’s offer of marriage because he lacks the moral “greatness and nobility” that Felix possesses. Felix, on the other hand, towers above the other characters as a moral god. Over the course of the mentoring process that Esther undergoes, she learns to regard him first as “‘greater and better . . . than [she] had imagined’” (197; ch. 22) and finally to revere him “as if he belonged to the solemn admonishing skies, checking her self-satisfied pettiness with the suggestion of a wider life” (302; ch. 37). In the latter quote a hint of Felix’s godlike status is easily perceptible in the image of a voice

from the heavens. Finally, Eliot's language breaks into overt religious imagery as can be seen in the following passage of indirect discourse, which occurs near the end of the novel. In it Esther contemplates the possibility that Felix's conviction for his role in the election riot might make a permanent separation between them. The same result would be accomplished by the marriage to Harold that she is considering. Esther first ponders her truncated relationship with Felix, in which she has seen a glimpse of a moral life more difficult but "higher" and "greater" than any she can be part of if she marries Harold. Then she reflects on the "moral mediocrity" (341; ch. 43) of the life of ease that would be hers as Harold's wife. At the end of the passage, the narrator returns to the mentoring relationship between Felix and Esther, at which point the religious imagery emerges:

The first spontaneous offering of her woman's devotion, the first great inspiration of her life, was a sort of vanished ecstasy which had left its wounds. It seemed to her a cruel misfortune of her young life that her best feeling, her most precious dependence, had been called forth just where the conditions were hardest, and that all the easy invitations of circumstance were towards something which that previous consecration of her longing had made a moral descent for her. . . . It seemed to her that she stood at the first and last parting of the ways. And, in one sense, she was under no illusion. It is only in that freshness of our time that the choice is possible which gives unity to life, and makes the memory *a temple where all relics and all votive offerings, all worship and all grateful joy, are an unbroken history sanctified by one religion.* (360, ch. 44; italics added)

As indicated in Chapter 1, morality became the equivalent of religion for Mary Ann Evans after she foreswore the God of the Christianity she was raised in. This becomes apparent in studying the language of *Felix Holt*. The novel is filled with the terms of a moral polarity, of which the massive-miniscule polarity of images discussed earlier is a subset. Three oppositionally paired examples among many from the moral polarity are “high demand” as contrasted to “immediate and easy indulgence” (341; ch. 43); “a noble mind” as contrasted to a “contemptible” one (223; ch. 27); “one [Felix] whose vision was wider, whose nature was purer and stronger than [Esther’s] own” (152; ch. 15), which Felix perceives as “trivial, narrow, selfish” (110; ch. 10). As Esther’s mentor, Felix must be a moral beacon to show her the way to human life on the heights of purity.

Feuerbach’s “other” or “Thou” can perform this service for the subject. Such an interchange is hallowed because of the “sacred” bond of fellowship between human beings. But why does George Eliot elevate Felix to the vacant throne of the Christian God, a step she does not take with any of the other mentors, even Daniel Deronda, who is relegated to mere angel status? (See Chapter 3.)

In George Eliot’s moral religion what is worshiped is the Good rather than God. As she has retained the moral values of Christianity virtually intact, the sole difference her new religion brings is the omission of the deity personified three times in the trinitarian formula. Eliot’s cosmology apparently contains no personified god pronouncing “Thou shalt not,” but the cultus of the abstract moral imperative “Thou shouldst” remains. “Thou shouldst” live according to the moral law because it is the best, the noblest, the truest way to live. The moral good is self-validating: it is not good because God has

declared it so but because it is good in and of itself. There should be no need to personify moral goodness in order to revere it as our “highest truth.” Eliot’s thinking seemingly went along those lines. She never overtly makes a god of Felix Holt and undoubtedly would have laughed incredulously at the suggestion. However, Eliot in effect makes an about-face. The goodness attributed to morality in her new religion is reified and apotheosized, but there is something unsatisfying about impersonal abstractions. In the process Eliot ends by reinstalling a god in the form of the Feuerbachian other, a figure she personifies in this novel as Felix Holt, a nineteenth-century Jesus who has come to save his people from moral turpitude and political corruption. How is this different from capitulating to the Christianity she has supposedly left behind? The main difference is that she herself is the author of the “scriptures” of the new religion of morality: her novels.

The terms of Eliot’s moral polarity often follow the standard spatial and substantial imagery employed in the traditional thought of the Christian west. Terms like *high*, *wide*, *deep*, *large*, and *substantial* have their antinomies in *low*, *narrow*, *shallow*, *small*, and *insubstantial*. The first set of terms, which is used to name the moral good, carries an ontological superiority with it while the second, which labels moral evil, is rather ontologically pathetic. The ontologically superior terms seem to take up more space and carry more weight in the universe. The other set is paltry and doesn’t seem to amount to much of anything. In using these dichotomous terms, Eliot seems, ironically and proleptically, to privilege a kind of Nietzschean-Freudian moral Übermensch of phallic force and substance. This Übermensch, the moral good/god, proclaims, “I’m bigger and

stronger than you are, so this world belongs to me.” The moral good, presented in these terms, seems to fill the world in a narcissistic manner, perhaps because the alternative—the dominance of moral evil—is so undesirable that it must be reduced to insubstantiality.

There is a Darwinian side to this moral monster too. George Eliot was familiar with *Origin of Species* and its central insight that only the strongest (or best adapted) survive in the struggle for existence. Diana Postlethwaite discusses the role of evolutionary ideas in Victorian thought in a way that makes clear that the moral life was an important component of them for Eliot and other thinkers. In particular she points to Lyric 118 of *In Memoriam*, which ends with the quatrain

Arise and fly

The reeling Faun, the sensual feast,

Move upward, working out the beast,

And let the ape and tiger die. (qtd. in Postlethwaite xvi; Tennyson 118.25-28, 79)¹

If, for the Victorians, the downside to evolutionary theory as regards human beings was the idea that human beings are descended from apes, Tennyson strikes the positive note here that evolutionary change can enable human beings to develop into something better—morally better—than they are. Notice Tennyson’s use of the spatial term “upward,” traditionally associated with “heavenward.” In such a way can we grow away from our beastly origins and into our heavenly heritage. Secular humanists such as George Eliot stopped short of the heavenly heritage part and professed contentment with moral excellence. Postlethwaite quotes from Eliot’s article “Evangelical Teaching: Dr Cumming”:

There is not a more pernicious fallacy afloat in common parlance, than the wide distinction made between intellect and morality. Amiable impulses without intellect, man may have in common with dogs and horses; but *morality, which is specifically human, is dependent on the regulation of feeling by intellect.* (qtd. in Postlethwaite 19-20; Eliot 144; italics added)

Eliot's linking of morality and intellect as quoted here is demonstrated as well in this passage from "Janet's Repentance," complete with a characteristic metaphor from science: "Evangelicalism had brought into palpable existence and operation in Milby society that idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, which is to the moral what the addition of a great central ganglion is to animal life" (320; ch. 10). Morality—feeling regulated by intellect—is, according to Eliot, the most highly evolved trait in the universe as we know it.²

It is instructive to ask why George Eliot was so preoccupied with morality. This is a preoccupation she shared with most other thinkers of her period, who were watching the dismantling of the Christian worldview by scientific theory and discovery and by the Higher Criticism's unmasking of the Bible's complex origins. Most faced the prospect of a godless universe with trepidation. Without a God in the universe acting as a moral guardian over human action, who could know what degradation we might be capable of? Mary Ann Evans herself experienced this fear most intensely at her father's deathbed. She expressed her apprehension in this way: "What shall I be without my Father? It will seem as if a part of my moral nature were gone. I had a horrid vision of myself last night becoming earthly sensual and devilish for want of that purifying restraining influence"

(Letter to Charles and Caroline Bray 284). Mary Ann reveals here that she is afraid of herself, her uncontrolled id; afraid that if she peers closely enough into the gloomy depths of her being, what she will find is a fiendishly amoral creature. Mary Ann is splitting the self in the traditional western fashion into soul and body, a high moral nature and a low bestial nature. (Note the inevitable recourse to the spatial dichotomy.) The only way she can strengthen her noble nature is by means of external restraint and purification, such as her father had provided her. Her father had put a face on morality for the young Mary Ann. Many years later, as a “moral teacher” whose primary forum is the novel, she performs the same Feuerbachian service for her pupils: the face of rough-hewn, honest Felix Holt can inspire and lead them, represented by Esther, to new moral heights.

Reaching these heights is paramount in George Eliot’s view. The reformed Esther agrees with her and is willing even to tolerate abuse for the sake of such a “noble” goal. (Eliot’s phrase for such martyrdom refers to “the iron entering a person’s soul.” See 386; ch. 49.) Such an exchange will be for Esther a sacrifice, a sacred giving up of herself. Eliot, like her Christian forebears, fetishizes sacrifice as an act magically potent in itself rather than as a means to a desired end. Thus Esther’s making this sacrifice of herself and her psychological health validates her claim to the patriarchal moral good personified in Felix. The sacrifice demonstrates her seriousness and proves her worthiness, finally, of Felix’s approbation. The patriarchy has, by the offices of an incarnate sky-god, tamed another shrew and won another victory for moral order.

NOTES

¹ Tennyson published *In Memoriam* in 1850, nine years before the publication of *Origin of Species*; even then, however, the notion of “development” was already being commonly discussed. One of Tennyson’s and Eliot’s main pre-Darwinian sources of thought concerning the “development hypothesis” was likely Robert Chambers’ *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (commonly referred to as *Vestiges of Creation*), published in 1844.

² G. H. Lewes includes some interesting remarks on moral evolution in his *The Study of Psychology* (the last volume, edited by Marian after his death, of his *Problems of Life and Mind*). See especially pages 78-80.

CHAPTER 3

GWENDOLEN HARLETH, MENTEE AND PATHOLOGICAL NARCISSIST: A FREUDIAN ANALYSIS

The opening scene of *Daniel Deronda* introduces the mentor-mentee relationship of Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth. Daniel comes upon Gwendolen at a gaming table at a resort for a stylish, idle clientele in Leubronn. He watches her gamble, and soon she becomes aware of the

darting sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of different quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order [which] roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict. (5-6; ch. 1)

It is typical that the mentor-mentee process begin with such a moment of judgment. It is also typical that the mentor's judgment be met initially with the mentee's resentment and resistance as in this first meeting between Daniel and Gwendolen. Because Gwendolen has "that sense of superior claims which [makes] a large part of her consciousness" (11; ch. 1), it will take some time and an incursion of self-doubt before she reaches the point of accepting and even desiring Daniel's mentorship over her.¹ Throughout the course of the mentoring relationship, Gwendolen will so reverse her original hauteur that she will be reduced to the abject dependence shown here:

[S]he did not imagine [Daniel] otherwise than always within her reach, her supreme need of him blinding her to the separateness of his life, the whole scene of which she filled with his relation to her. . . .And the future which she turned her face to with a willing step was one where she would be continually assimilating herself to some type that he would hold before her. Had he not first risen on her vision as a corrective presence which she had recognized in the beginning with resentment, and at last with entire love and trust? She could not spontaneously think of an end to that reliance, which had become to her imagination like the firmness of the earth, the only condition of her walking. (682; ch. 69)

By likening Gwendolen's reliance on Daniel to the solid earth beneath her feet, Eliot seems to imply that Daniel has become for Gwendolen the ground of her being. By this point in their relationship, Gwendolen has lost so much confidence in herself that she no longer believes in her own power to form decisions and act upon them. It is only with Daniel's constant directives that she feels secure about acting. Her identity is lost in an effort to reflect his image.

Gwendolen is the weakest and the unhealthiest of Eliot's mentees, being "well wadded with stupidity" (*Middlemarch* [194, ch. 20]; in the following chapter Eliot amplifies the meaning of *stupidity* by calling it "moral stupidity"[211]). None of the other mentees is relegated by Eliot to the level of dependence on the mentor shown in the passage quoted above. One reason for Gwendolen's position of extremity as her mentoring experience draws to a close is that, of all the mentees, she has had the farthest to fall in terms of arrogant egotism. Romola, for example, is already a noble woman

when she begins her mentoring relationship with Savonarola. She is a loving daughter and sister, but Eliot depicts Romola's pagan upbringing as limiting her in the development of a spiritually based social conscience. The main thing her Christian mentor teaches this upright pagan is "Love your neighbor." As discussed in Chapter 2, Esther is vain and preoccupied with a trifling romanticism when Felix begins to criticize her for these faults. Esther's shallow vanity compels her to attempt to elevate herself above others in her own class by cultivating a refined taste in dress, manners, and literature. Despite her superciliousness, she desires the admiration of others and hopes one day to marry a gentleman who can raise her above her station and give her a life of elegance and ease. This is the extent of her ambition when Felix enters her life and begins to open her eyes to her pettiness. Like Esther, Gwendolen is self-centered. Gwendolen's self-centeredness, however, goes beyond mere vanity: despite Eliot's assertion to the contrary in Chapter 35 (354), Gwendolen is hungry for power. Gwendolen takes others' admiration as a mere given; what excites her is the ability to have another under her dominance. Eliot's statement in Chapter 35 that Gwendolen has "a native love of homage, and belief in her own power; but no cold artifice for the sake of enslaving" (354) is one of several throughout the novel, the aim of which is to show that Gwendolen is not irretrievably lost, that she has the potential for moral growth. Nevertheless, Eliot deemed that Gwendolen's case is so extreme that she must be "spiritually saved, but 'so as by fire'" (Letter to John Blackwood 188).

George Eliot's perspective on her mentees was a moral one (morality serving as Eliot's effective equivalent for spirituality). She was one of the leading exponents of the

Victorian era's serious preoccupation with morality despite her living arrangement with G. H. Lewes, which constituted a prominent Victorian scandal. In her mentor-mentee narratives she makes a value judgment against the mentees in their egotistic prementoring state. Viewing *Daniel Deronda* from this side of the Freudian divide, however, we can shift to a more descriptively scientific focus.² Textual clues from *Daniel Deronda* offer support for the claim that Gwendolen, in the virtual absence of a father figure, has remained fixated on the preoedipal mother and has developed only a weak, incomplete superego. She is, in addition, a pathological narcissist.³ According to psychoanalytic theory, the child's oral phase takes place approximately from birth to eighteen months, the anal phase from one-to-three years, and the oedipal phase (when the superego begins to develop) from three-to-six years (Freud qtd. in Colarusso 5). Edith Jacobson locates the girl's superego development even more precisely: at age three (194). In the preoedipal stage it is normal for children to be attached to the mother, who is the primary object (or human relation) for both sexes (Zanardi 5). In a girl's normal development, she transfers her cathexis (or emotional investment) to the father as she moves into the oedipal phase (Freud, "Female Sexuality" 230). Gwendolen's history, however, is marked by an absent father. Her father dies sometime between Gwendolen's birth and her second year ("when his little daughter was in long clothes" [17; ch. 1]). It can be calculated that Gwendolen's mother marries her stepfather, Captain Davilow, when Gwendolen is four-to-five years old because Alice, Captain and Mrs. Davilow's first child, is sixteen at the opening of the narrative while Gwendolen at that time is "twenty and more" (18; ch.1). The text states that the Captain, who dies shortly before the family

moves to Offendene, has “for the last nine years, joined his family only in a brief and fitful manner” (17; ch. 1).

Gwendolen’s own father has died, then, before she is old enough to have established much of a bond with him. Her stepfather manages to remain absent during much of his marriage, and, no doubt at least partly because of this, Gwendolen never bonds with him. At the age of twelve, she makes this statement to her mother: “‘Why did you marry again, mamma? It would have been nicer if you had not’” (18; ch. 1). Here Gwendolen seems to express the sentiment that a father figure is nothing more than an intrusion upon the preoedipal mother-daughter dyad. That it is fair to apply this pattern to the relationship between Gwendolen and her mother is supported by some intriguing textual details. One of the most prominent appears in this passage:

It was always arranged, when possible, that [Gwendolen] should have a small bed in her mamma’s room; for Mrs Davilow’s motherly tenderness clung chiefly to her eldest girl, who had been born in her happier time. One night under an attack of pain she found that the specific regularly placed by her bedside had been forgotten, and begged Gwendolen to get out of bed and reach it for her. That healthy young lady, snug and warm as a rosy infant in her little couch, objected to step out into the cold, and lying perfectly still, grumbled a refusal. Mrs Davilow went without the medicine and never reproached her daughter; but the next day Gwendolen was keenly conscious of what must be in her mamma’s mind, and tried to make amends by caresses which cost her no effort. (18; ch. 1)

The passage provides one of many textual examples of Gwendolen’s egotism;

furthermore, it shows the perseverance of the preoedipal bond between mother and daughter in their unusual sleeping arrangement, especially considering Mrs. Davilow has four daughters younger than Gwendolen. Most significant is the description of Gwendolen as “snug and warm as a rosy infant in her little couch.” This image, which miniaturizes and infantilizes Gwendolen, emphasizes the fixation on the preoedipal bond. Freud would undoubtedly point out the safe, womblike enclosure of Gwendolen’s “little couch” in her mother’s room.

Gwendolen’s fixation has been caused by the absence of both her father and stepfather. With no father figure to help her move into the oedipal phase, Gwendolen’s development has been arrested or retarded. In normal development, the superego is formed at the end of the oedipal phase; as mentioned above, Jacobson locates this event for girls as early as three years old. At the age of three, Gwendolen has no father figure in her life whatsoever. Therefore, she experiences only an attenuated oedipal development at best and a delayed and incomplete subsequent formation of the superego.⁴ In the mentor-mentee relationship it becomes Daniel’s task first to act as Gwendolen’s superego (Johnstone 174; Lerner 361) and then to help her create an internalized superego, which, however, is pathological on account of her continued narcissism. The superego is a self-judging mechanism in the psyche which monitors the self’s behavior in terms of standards derived from parental figures (which include teachers and other cultural authorities as the person advances in life) (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 61ff). A normative superego is formed by the introjection of the parental imagos with the authority, injunctions, and prohibitions which they represent. The process of superego

formation is in effect the recognition of the power of the other. A narcissist, however, strives to maintain a sense of omnipotence in which the other is not acknowledged as being equally worthy of respect. Therefore, while narcissists may be motivated by certain inhibitions so as not to lose the homage of their adoring audiences, a true distinction between right and wrong is not operative in their stunted superegos.

Gwendolen's faulty oedipal development—her fixation on the preoedipal bond—can be shown to be linked also to the abhorrence of sex which she displays in her relationships with Rex, especially, and with Grandcourt. When Rex tries to turn their relationship from the friendliness of cousins to a sexual love relationship, Gwendolen is repulsed: "The perception that poor Rex wanted to be tender made her curl up and harden like a sea-anemone at the touch of a finger. . . . She felt passionately averse to this volunteered love" (66-67; ch. 7). She sends Rex away with an unequivocal rejection; afterwards, her mother finds her "sobbing bitterly." As Mrs. Davilow attempts to comfort her, Gwendolen makes this significant admission, which places further emphasis on the archaic mother-daughter bond: "I can't bear any one to be very near me but you" (68; ch. 7). The pattern continues in Gwendolen's relationship with Grandcourt. One of the reasons she initially finds him less repulsive than other men is the cool distance he maintains from her during their courtship and engagement. It is easily imaginable that one of the chief horrors Gwendolen suffers after her marriage is the mastery Grandcourt undoubtedly imposes upon her in the form of unwanted and possibly brutal sexual advances.

In his piece "Female Sexuality" Freud offers two possible explanations for a woman's

revulsion against sex. In his discussion of the unusually long duration of the mother-daughter preoedipal bond in some cases, he states that one possible result is that “a number of women remain arrested in their original attachment to their mother and never achieve a true change-over towards men” (226). The other explanation Freud advances is that some girls, in the disappointment of discovering their own state of castration, can fall into “a general revulsion from sexuality” (229). The first explanation seems more nearly to fit Gwendolen’s characterization. In the first place, there can be no doubt that Gwendolen is fixated on the preoedipal relation with her mother. Secondly, in the latter example, the woman who is dispirited on account of her castration “gives up . . . her sexuality in general as well as a good part of her masculinity in other fields (229). *Dispirited* is not an adjective we can reasonably apply to the early Gwendolen. In addition, she bears more of the characteristics of a woman who refuses to accept her castration. These women, Freud believed, want to claim masculinity (and its rights and privileges) for themselves and “cling [to it] with defiant self-assertiveness” (229).

Gwendolen’s grandiose egotism, which is unmistakable in her characterization as “the spoiled child” (Book I title) and “the princess in exile” (32; ch. 4) can be linked to her incomplete oedipal triad as well as can her faulty superego formation. Psychoanalyst Heinz Henseler describes pathological narcissism as originating in a situation similar to the one in which Eliot places Gwendolen. In such a situation the absence of the father enables the child to become fixated on “the narcissistic mirror-relationship with the mother” (211). Gwendolen can, in fact, be shown to have a narcissistic character disorder (or, to use the terminology of the *DSM-IV*, a Narcissistic Personality Disorder). This is

the case not only at the beginning of the novel but even after Daniel's noble efforts to eradicate her egotism. According to Otto F. Kernberg, a person with a narcissistic character disorder, or a pathological narcissist, is someone whose self-structure has been formed by splitting off, denying, or projecting any negative representations or perceptions of the self rather than integrating these perceptions with positive perceptions to form a more realistic self (145-46). The narcissist strives to maintain a sense of omnipotence within his or her self-structure. The idea of others' having equivalent centers of self is intolerable to a narcissist. Gwendolen manifests this trait in her obliviousness of Daniel's having his own life filled with other people and with concerns that have nothing to do with his relationship to her. Kernberg states,

For these patients, the ordinary linkage of self to object is mostly lost and replaced by a grandiose "self-self" linkage underlying their frail object relations, a pathological development that truly constitutes a severe pathology of object relations with loss of both the investment in a normal self-structure and the capacity for normal object relations. (146)

Object relations (or relations with other human beings), for the pathological narcissist, serve the primary purpose of aggrandizing the "self-self" linkage, which can be thought of as the project of "making the universe me." Thus Gwendolen, in her preoccupation with her own ascendancy over all around her and in her claim to be the cynosure wherever she may happen to grace the scene, is determined "on the heights of her young self-exultation . . . no longer [to] be sacrificed to creatures worth less than herself . . . [but rather to] conquer circumstance by her exceptional cleverness" (31; ch. 4). The image of

Gwendolen kissing her reflection in the mirror prominent early in the novel as the reader is just being introduced to her (13; ch. 2) perfectly sums up her narcissism.

Nikolaas Treurniet describes narcissistic character disorders as linked to a seemingly opposite form of personality disorder. The narcissistic character disorder introduced above is characterized by the need “to sustain the belief in a state of omnipotent self-sufficiency, side by side with an intense and overwhelming dependency, expressed as a craving for admiration” (83). The second form that Treurniet identifies, which he calls the borderline personality organization, is characterized by “extreme dependence” (83). (This personality organization corresponds to the *DSM-IV*’s classification Dependent Personality Disorder.) People who fit this type of personality feel empty and unreal without the person they cling to with a desire almost to merge their beings into that of the other. Being separate, independent individuals is overwhelmingly frightening, and borderline personalities avoid it by submerging themselves into the relationship with the other. This submersion includes an inability to make judgments and decisions or to take action without being propped up by the constant support and guidance of the other.

Treurniet points out that what these two types of character disorder have in common is that in both cases object ties are damaged. In the first type described, the narcissistic character disorder, the patients display a “denial of connectedness” and in the second, the borderline personality organization, a “denial of separateness” (83). In both cases the patients’ self-structure is so fragile that it is impossible for them to develop normal object relations. In the borderline personality type this sense of vulnerability about the self is easy to see. These patients have, in effect, given up their identities in surrendering to the

desire to merge with the other. In the narcissist the vulnerability is masked; these patients avoid connection with others, *fearing* that they will lose their identities in contact with others, especially if others respond to them “unempathically” (84), which would constitute what Freud would call a “narcissistic wound.”

The two types of character disorder that Treurniet links match the two phases of Gwendolen’s personality. In her prementoring days, she fits the profile of the narcissist. She considers herself queen of all she surveys, and holds sway over all within the reach of her influence. But Rex’s too close approach threatens the danger of a possible intimate connection and therefore a lost identity. Klesmer’s and later Daniel’s failures to admire Gwendolen as she thinks they ought render her serious blows to her narcissistic self-regard. These blows, in fact, initiate the mentoring process, in which Klesmer briefly and then Daniel more extensively work at making Gwendolen see that her sense of omnipotence is an illusion she must sacrifice for the good of the community to which she belongs. She does lose the sense of omnipotence, but at the end of the novel she has not been restored to health. She has merely become a borderline personality, needing Daniel’s breath in her nostrils in order to survive. Eliot appears to consider the mentoring process a successful operation in Gwendolen’s case. However, as can be seen by the descriptions above, Gwendolen’s underlying pathology has remained essentially the same while only the outward manifestation of it has changed.

The narcissistic self which Gwendolen in her prementoring state so splendidly represents is made up of a dominant, relatively unchecked id; a weak ego, which needs constant defense against the danger of merging with others; and an equally weak, because

incomplete, superego. As we have seen above, the superego has not fully developed in part because the ego has not been forced by the oedipal process to relinquish its early belief in its own omnipotence. This self's boundaries are ineffective, and therefore object relations are a threat to its own integrity. This self, as Gwendolen demonstrates, retains the vitality of the id but lacks the restraint, inner peace, and concern for others that a true balance of superego and id with a dominant ego would engender.

One of the most striking characteristics of Gwendolen's narcissistic personality is the "fits of spiritual dread" (52; ch. 6) she suffers throughout the course of the novel. Below is Eliot's earliest discussion of them:

Solitude in any wide scene impressed [Gwendolen] with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself. The little astronomy taught her at school used sometimes to set her imagination at work in a way that made her tremble; but always when some one joined her she recovered her indifference to the vastness in which she seemed an exile; she found again her usual world in which her will was of some avail, and the religious nomenclature belonging to this world was no more identified for her with those uneasy impressions of awe than her uncle's surplices seen out of use at the rectory. With human ears and eyes about her she had always hitherto recovered her confidence, and felt the possibility of winning empire. (52; ch. 6)

While these "fits" seem to resemble the symptoms of agoraphobia, Eliot's first major scene illustrating the fits takes place indoors in front of a group of people. In this scene

Gwendolen is frightened by the sudden, spontaneous opening of a panel in the wall, exposing a painting of a dead face and a fleeing figure (49; ch. 6). As Albert Cirillo has remarked, more likely the fits are symptomatic of Gwendolen's narcissism (208). The feeling of dread is activated by a sense of herself as being only very small and insignificant in the face of the vastness of the universe. Her narcissism causes her in effect to want to *be* the universe; she is only comfortable with the belief that there is nothing that is not-me. Gwendolen does not believe this literally; still her primary aim in life is that of "winning empire"—this "conquering" of the outside world and bringing it under her dominion is her way of assimilating more and more of the world into the narcissistic me.

Eliot's purpose, however, in presenting such a spiritual sensibility in Gwendolen is to demonstrate that she has the potential for moral salvation, "a root of conscience" (573; ch. 54). Subsequent scenes which illustrate her preternatural sensitivity take place after the root of conscience has begun to sprout life. One of the most prominent is a scene taking place on her wedding day. In this scene she receives the Grandcourt family diamonds from Lydia Glasher, Grandcourt's cast-off mistress, who has enclosed a venomous letter accusing Gwendolen of the betrayal of the promise she had made not to interfere with Lydia's aspirations to become Grandcourt's legal wife. Gwendolen reacts as if she has received a message from the spirit world: "It seemed at first as if Gwendolen's eyes were spell-bound in reading the horrible words of the letter over and over again as a doom of penance; but suddenly a new spasm of terror made her lean forward and stretch out the paper towards the fire. . ." (303; ch. 31). Unlike the

exposition of the novel's earlier scene depicting Gwendolen's spiritual terror, referred to above, this scene introduces a rudimentary moral element to Gwendolen's consciousness. Penance is not a concept that would occur to the earlier Gwendolen in reference to an action of her own. But here Gwendolen is beginning to live more in accordance with the admonition given in the novel's epigraph: "Let thy chief terror be of thine own soul" (Frontispiece). The state of soul Eliot is warning against is, not surprisingly, the state of selfishness, in which "the throng of hurrying desires/ . . . trample o'er the dead to seize their spoil. . ." (Frontispiece). By now others have become substantial enough to startle Gwendolen at times into recognition of their separate existence.

Late in the novel the apparition of the dead face and the fleeing figure, which terrifies Gwendolen in the first of these scenes, becomes realized in the incident of Grandcourt's boating accident. When Grandcourt falls overboard, Gwendolen experiences the impulse to withhold help and, in fact, sees him drown. Gwendolen narrates this incident herself to Daniel, who is fortuitously on the scene. Her narration can more properly be called a confession, for Gwendolen is convinced that she has acted upon the murderous desires toward Grandcourt that she has been struggling against. The series of confessional scenes in which she bares her soul to Daniel are an important feature of their mentor-mentee relationship. In these scenes Gwendolen lays her "crime" at Daniel's feet and pours forth the long tale of her wishes, fantasies, fears, motivations, and temptations that provides its background. For Eliot, such a propensity for self-accusation is a precious asset in a mentee, a sign that she is growing in moral grace. The mentor fills the role of a priest or a judge, holding the mentee morally accountable for her actions but also guiding the

process of reform.

Daniel is appropriately presented as an angel—“a terrible-browed angel” (577; ch. 54) and “a rescuing angel” (693; ch. 70)—in his judging relation to Gwendolen, a messenger from God sent to arrest her in her sinful path and to redirect her into the path of righteousness. In a similar passage Daniel significantly uses the angel image himself as he describes to Gwendolen what has happened to her in the mentoring experience: ““You have had a vision of injurious, selfish action—a vision of possible degradation; think that a severe angel, seeing you along the road of error, grasped you by the wrist, and showed you the horror of the life you must avoid”” (658; ch. 65).⁵ Angels, in traditional Christian lore, are beings who bridge the gap between the divine and human realms. They represent God; the purpose of their existence is to carry out God’s behests. They live much closer to God than mortals do. Viewed as an imaginative construct, they are a fantasy of a religious and existential “perfection” human beings will never attain: they have no bodily needs, nor do they sin or suffer temptation. They do not have to search for the truth, for they live in its (God’s) presence constantly. The angel Daniel presents to Gwendolen, both verbally in the passage above and symbolically in his role as a mentor, is severe in carrying out the moral rescue she requires. His severity befits the horrendous ““vision of injurious, selfish action’,” even ““degradation’,” that he must show to Gwendolen to make her realize the moral peril she is in. He is able to fulfil this role because he has higher moral standards than Gwendolen does, just as an angel in the traditional Christian cosmology dwells on a higher plane than mortals do.

With the help of her heavenly guide, George Eliot employs the mentoring experience

as a way to “save” Gwendolen from the egotism which so flaws her character. Seeing that community held together by the bonds of mutual sympathy is Eliot’s vision of the ideal for human life, we can understand that a narcissist like Gwendolen would represent to Eliot humanity at its worst. Of the mentees who complete the mentoring process, Gwendolen is the the extreme case; all the others either have some saving graces or are not so advanced in their egotism; thus, their mentors’ tasks are easier.⁶ Because Gwendolen must come back from a place where sympathy does not exist, her need for a strong, virtuous mentor is the greater. Daniel is that savior, and Klesmer acts as his forerunner and prepares the way. Eliot offers the mentoring experience as a violent cure for a deadly illness or as the rescue of a soul who is lost and drowning.

Klesmer fills the role of protomentor to Gwendolen. She asks him for his advice in her plan of becoming a professional singer or actress in answer to her newly impoverished family’s demand for support and to avoid lowering herself by taking a governess’ post. Klesmer obliges by delivering to her a narcissistic wound: he bluntly informs her that she lacks the talent “‘hardly [to] achieve more than mediocrity’” (221; ch. 23). His abrasive plain-spokenness, in fact, begins to penetrate Gwendolen’s egotistic certainty of her superior merit: “His words had really bitten into her self-confidence and turned it into the pain of a bleeding wound. . . .Every word that Klesmer had said seemed to have been branded into her memory, as most words are which bring with them a new set of impressions and make an epoch for us” (222-23; ch. 23). Unlike the experience of other mentees, the mentor’s initial ushering in of the “epoch” is not sufficient here to set Gwendolen on a steady course of change. The unkind light of reality which Klesmer

shines on Gwendolen does begin to unsettle her omnipotent delusions, but her egotism runs far too deep to allow itself to be eradicated by this early attempt. Daniel, Gwendolen's mentor proper, somewhat reluctantly takes on the bulk of the work.

Daniel is a severe mentor as befits the enormity of Gwendolen's egotism, but his delicate sensibility to her pain inclines him to employ a gentle approach whenever possible, thus mitigating the harshness that Klesmer has shown. By displacing the most stringent quality of the mentor—a disposition to dispense painful criticism—from Daniel to Klesmer, Eliot can sustain Daniel as a blameless paragon.⁷ Daniel is a natural mentor. Prominent in the novel are characters whom he has rescued or helped in some way: primarily Mirah, but also Hans and Mordecai. He feels drawn to people with

nature[s] liable to difficulty and struggle—elements of life which had a predominant attraction for his sympathy, due perhaps to his early pain in dwelling on the conjectured story of his own existence. Persons attracted him, as Hans Meyrick had done, in proportion to the possibility of his defending them, rescuing them, telling upon their lives with some sort of redeeming influence; and he had to resist an inclination, easily accounted for, to withdraw coldly from the fortunate. (273; ch. 28)

Eliot attributes Daniel's propensity to be a mentor to the "early pain" of suspecting that he is Sir Hugo's illegitimate son. She philosophizes that whereas "a self-centered, unloving nature" can become alienated from others in such a circumstance, "the rarer sort [read Daniel] . . . presently see their own frustrated claim as one among a myriad, [and for them] the inexorable sorrow takes the form of fellowship and makes the imagination

tender” (148-49; ch. 16). Fellowship is the truth Daniel has found, and he undertakes to guide Gwendolen to it as he has guided others.

Thus Daniel judges Gwendolen, dispensing his guidance in a nurturing if grave manner, his gravity sustained in a series of moral precepts of which he is duly delivered throughout the mentoring process. The following is a choice example: “‘Within ourselves our evil will is momentous, and sooner or later it works its way outside us—it may be in the vitiation that breeds evil acts, but also it may be in the self-aborrence that stings us to better striving’” (598; ch. 57). The surprising thing, on a close examination of the text, is to find how few of these gnomic sayings it contains: less than 20 in a novel numbering almost 700 pages. Despite their relative scarcity, these passages reverberate throughout the narrative and substantially contribute to the exaggeratedly stiff propriety of Daniel’s characterization.

To our post-Freudian eyes, such behavior as Daniel’s propensity always to be the “helper” appears codependent. It betrays a personality who needs to maintain control over a dependent object in order to feel any sense of self-worth (O’Brien and Gaborit 133). A codependent operates under the assumption “that relating to another person is incompatible with relating to one’s own needs and feelings” (Cermak 18). A codependent’s excessive caretaking of another and emotional investment in the other’s needs is a way of avoiding dealing with his or her own painful emotions. Such a codependent personality works to perpetuate the other’s dependence and therefore is prolonging the mutual dysfunction. If the object manages to outgrow the dependence, the codependent subject will often go in search of a new dependent object so that the cycle

begins again.

Despite his general tendency to codependency, Daniel is, at least on a conscious level, a reluctant mentor in Gwendolen's case. Beyond the initial look of judgment which he gives to Gwendolen as she gambles and the related action of redeeming and returning the necklace she has pawned for additional gambling money, Daniel is an almost passive mentor. After these first steps, Gwendolen takes the initiative in seeking him out as a mentor. There are moments when Daniel "dread[s] the weight of this woman's soul flung upon his own with imploring dependence" (591; ch. 56). Daniel accepts the role half unwillingly; moreover, he continually has doubts that he can really help Gwendolen in the way that she needs: "It was as if he saw her drowning while his limbs were bound" (389; ch. 36). His reluctance is in part derived from a repulsion he feels at times towards Gwendolen—the Gwendolen who is a society beauty, aglitter with the graces of one who inhabits that artificial, idle world of money, fashion, leisure, and indifference. His interest is piqued, however, when, after her engagement to Grandcourt, he begins to perceive that Gwendolen is undergoing some kind of inner struggle:

Gwendolen seemed more decidedly attractive than before; and certainly there had been changes going on within her since that time at Leubronn: the struggle of mind attending a conscious error had wakened something like a new soul, which had better, but also worse, possibilities than her former poise of crude self-confidence. . . . (280; ch. 29)

Gwendolen's former self-confidence seems "crude" to Daniel because he, as Eliot's mouthpiece, considers the strivings for omnipotence to which Gwendolen's narcissism

impels her to be the depth of unrefinement in a human soul. The omnipotence of narcissism is a rejection of others in favor of the self; in George Eliot's Christian-derived value system, this is anathema.

In her desperate need for a mentor, Gwendolen does not perceive Daniel's hesitance and doubts about his own fitness for the role. Her initial reaction at Leubronn is resentment towards Daniel's presumption of judging her and interfering with her actions. However, in the wake of a momentous choice, Gwendolen experiences for the first time a sense of moral guilt, which begins to awaken her to her need for a mentor. When she chooses to accept Grandcourt's offer of marriage in spite of her promise to Lydia Glasher that she will not, she wrongs Grandcourt's illegitimate family by standing in their way. The rumored story told about Daniel's being Sir Hugo's bastard son links Daniel in Gwendolen's mind with the bastards she is depriving of any hope of being legitimized. Through this process Gwendolen conceives a "superstitious dread" of Daniel as the person whose judging look has first made her aware that her conduct is deserving of critical scrutiny (278; ch. 29). Even while she continues to resist Daniel's original reprobation, her sense of guilt towards Lydia Glasher and her children begins to cause Gwendolen, in further meetings with Daniel, to feel a sense of compelling fascination for him. She begins to be aware that Daniel has judged her by an "unknown standard" (368; ch. 35), a way of perceiving the world—new to her—in which the claims of others are accepted as having primacy over our own. At a New Year's Eve party, significantly, Gwendolen signals to Daniel that she is willing to undertake the mentoring process by wearing, wrapped three times around her wrist, the necklace that he has redeemed for her

at Leubronn. Cirillo comments,

The turquoise necklace has evolved in significance from a valueless object with which Gwendolen would willingly part to the very objective embodiment of her dependence on Deronda. . . . [T]he turquoise necklace is recognized by Deronda as symptomatic of Gwendolen's submission to him, not in the fearful manner of her forced submission to Grandcourt, but in a willing subjection to penance. . . . (215)

Cirillo goes on to point out (218) that Gwendolen arrives at a moment of virtual submission to Daniel later in this scene, when her facial expression, according to Eliot's narrator, betrays a "subsidence of self-assertion" (383; ch. 36). Daniel is "becoming part of [Gwendolen's] conscience" (355; ch. 35). Her sense of omnipotence is breaking down. Significantly, George Eliot furnishes us in a scene closely following with a modified image of Gwendolen at the mirror: "she sat leaning over the end of a couch, supporting her head with her hand, and looking at herself in a mirror—not in admiration, but in a sad kind of companionship" (369; ch. 35).⁸ Just as significant is the fact that this mournful gaze at her mirror image—now a companion rather than a reflection of self—is accompanied by musings about Daniel: "I wish he could know everything about me without my telling him" (368; ch. 35). Gwendolen is expressing here the wish to merge with the other, which is characteristic of the dependent personality organization. In that case she and Daniel would not be forced by the separateness of their beings to communicate through language; they would be one. Gwendolen's narcissism is changing shape: she is relinquishing omnipotence in favor of dependence. For Eliot, however, it is purely a moral occurrence: a further wish of Gwendolen's is for Daniel to know "that I

am not so contemptible as he thinks me” and to see that “[I] want to be something better if I could” (369; ch. 35). Still Gwendolen’s first wish here, focused on Daniel’s perception of her, wanting him not to think of her as “contemptible,” shows that his judgment, once repudiated, is now becoming the organizing construct of her consciousness. Her “want[ing] to be something better” is therefore only a “wanting to be what he wants me to be simply because he wants it.”

Increasingly Gwendolen’s personality is characterized by her dependence on Daniel to direct her steps. “I asked you to come because I want you to tell me what I ought to do,” she began, at once” (656; ch. 65) is a typical conversation opener between Gwendolen and Daniel in the latter part of the novel. The following passage exemplifies Eliot’s Feuerbachian understanding of Gwendolen’s dependence:

She wanted again to see and consult Deronda, that she might secure herself against any act he would disapprove. Would her remorse have maintained its power within her, or would she have felt absolved by secrecy, if it had not been for that outer conscience which was made for her by Deronda? It is hard to say how much we could forgive ourselves if we were secure from judgment by another whose opinion is the breathing-medium of all our joy—who brings to us with close pressure and immediate sequence that judgment of the Invisible and Universal which self-flattery and the world’s tolerance would easily melt and disperse. In this way our brother may be in the stead of God to us, and his opinion which has pierced even to the joints and marrow, may be our virtue in the making.

(653; ch. 64)

Such a view is congenial to Eliot's modified religious beliefs: the link between human beings is much more conducive to moral development than anything the far-fetched abstraction of a transcendent God can afford. Gwendolen's growth as a moral being is the novel's most important offering from Eliot's point of view. She explains the dependence upon Daniel into which Gwendolen falls as a process legitimated by the emergency created by the moral danger Gwendolen has found herself in: "Considerations such as would have filled the minds of indifferent spectators could not occur to her, any more than if flames had been mounting around her, and she had flung herself into his opened arms and clung about his neck that he might carry her into safety" (660; ch. 65). For Eliot the narrative's substance is Gwendolen's moral salvation: she is rescued by Daniel from the moral disaster of being an unloving, self-centered woman and is transformed, by his influence, into a loving, self-renouncing woman.

Both the Christian tradition from which Eliot derives her moral value system and Victorian culture in its strictures for women's character and conduct are in accordance with Eliot's final vision of the morally redeemed Gwendolen. Self-abnegation is the proper stance for a moral woman. Eliot's elitist conservatism impelled her to embrace it as the ideal for her women characters if not for herself. In setting forth this ideal, she not surprisingly works with the criterion of the moral self-judgment as when Daniel reflects that he "could not utter one word to diminish that sacred aversion [in Gwendolen] to her worse self—that thorn pressure which must come from the crowning of the sorrowful

Better, suffering because of the Worse” (597; ch. 66). In Eliot’s world the different selves an individual might inhabit are to be judged by their moral merit or demerit. The Christ image in the passage above, with its reference to the crown of thorns, underlines the fact that morality is the essence of religion for Eliot. For her, making value judgments on the moral status of her various characters is tantamount to a religious obligation.

The story of Gwendolen is, therefore, for Eliot, a resurrection story, a story of new birth into moral consciousness. She uses the imagery of awakening (587; ch. 55), eyes opening (577; ch. 54), the painful letting in of light (388; ch. 36), the exchanging of the “narrow round” for “a larger home” (387; ch. 36) to describe this process. The new birth is ushered in by an epiphany, another characteristic feature of the mentoring process. Gwendolen has a series of epiphanies leading to the final, decisive one, which occurs when Daniel tells her of his Zionist mission: “The world seemed getting larger round poor Gwendolen, and she more solitary and helpless in the midst. . . .[S]he felt herself reduced to a mere speck. . . .[S]he was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world. . . .” (688-89; ch. 69). This new perspective, which Gwendolen adopts and which restores the value of things to the proper proportions for her, is similar to the fits of spiritual dread she has been subject to all along. The difference is that Gwendolen is at last resigning the supremacy she has always claimed, so that the sensation of being a tiny particle lost in a vast cosmos is becoming more her normative identity. She is now incorporating the sensation rather than shudderingly avoiding it by seeking refuge in the admiring company of others as before. The new, powerful life that Gwendolen

experiences as a result of her epiphanies is depicted in the following passage:

[Daniel's] words were like the touch of a miraculous hand to Gwendolen.

Mingled emotions streamed through her frame with a strength that seemed the beginning of a new existence, having some new powers or other which stirred in her vaguely. So pregnant is the divine hope of moral recovery with the energy that fulfils it. So potent in us is the infused action of another soul, before which we bow in complete love. But the new existence seemed inseparable from

Deronda. . . . (659; ch. 65)

Eliot is clearly describing what she considers to be a monumental change in Gwendolen's character, the change from moral impoverishment to the strength of a new moral being.

The question we must pose, nevertheless, concerns the kind of change Gwendolen actually undergoes. According to Eliot, Gwendolen has left her narcissism behind and has become a person sensitive to the needs of others. However, as stated above, in light of psychoanalytic theory, it is more accurate to view Gwendolen's mental pathology as merely changing shape, from the omnipotence-seeking narcissism she exhibits at the beginning of the novel to the dependent borderline personality disorder she develops in the mentoring process. It could be argued that, with Daniel's imminent departure for Palestine at the end of the novel, Gwendolen will be forced at any rate to relinquish her dependence on him. It is true that she will have to give up the comfort of his physical presence. But another subtle change in the last pages is taking place and is an indication that Gwendolen is not actually giving up her dependence on Daniel after all. The dependence simply becomes spiritualized. In the quote above, the change becomes

evident. Following hard on the imagery of new life and power is the admission that the source of this new power is “the infused action of another soul, before which we bow in complete love.” The power is then dependent on this other soul. The next sentence so patently belies the idea of independent strength and power in Gwendolen that it hardly needs any additional comment: “the new existence seemed inseparable from Deronda. . . .” Admittedly, the passage discussed above takes place before Gwendolen finds out that Daniel is leaving the country and that their mentoring sessions are effectively over. But when he does finally tell her about his plans, he seems to encourage the idea of a spiritualizing transformation of their relationship in the following quote: “ ‘I shall be more with you than I used to be,’ Deronda said with gentle urgency. . . . ‘If we had been much together before, we should have felt our differences more, and seemed to get farther apart. Now we can perhaps never see each other again. But our minds may get nearer’ ” (691; ch. 69).

The final communication between Gwendolen and Daniel also bears out the idea that her dependence on him is continuing in a transmuted form. Gwendolen sends Daniel a letter on his wedding day, which reads in part: “*“Do not think of me sorrowfully on your wedding-day. I have remembered your words—that I may live to be one of the best of women, who make others glad that they were born. I do not yet see how that can be, but you know better than I. If it ever comes true, it will be because you helped me”*” (695, ch. 70; italics in original). Gwendolen admits here that she does not comprehend Daniel’s vision for her future. Nevertheless, she trusts in its validity because, in her dependence on him, she can do nothing else.

The anatomy of Gwendolen's postmentoring psyche shows that there has been a shift in balance, which nevertheless has still resulted in an imbalance. Before, her id is the dominant element, but now her superego rules the psyche. This overweening superego is the reason for an id massively repressed and an ego now extremely weak. Gwendolen's new affectless demeanor, seen in this passage, is an indication of an id which has renounced its zest for living: "there was no approach to a smile on her lips. She had never smiled since her husband's death. When she stood still and in silence, she looked like a melancholy statue of the Gwendolen whose laughter had once been so ready when others were grave" (660; ch. 65). The moral dictates of Daniel, now beginning to be internalized, make up the substance of Gwendolen's consciousness. The ego's increased weakness indicates boundaries between self and other that are in greater disrepair than ever. This will be evident in Gwendolen's new belief that she is responsible for other people's lives; living for others, that Christian virtue, will be her future life's work. Where before, Gwendolen displays the fear of connectedness that is a manifestation of her striving for omnipotence, now she is showing the fear of separateness that accompanies the dependence of the borderline personality (or Dependent Personality Disorder). This fear is a contributing cause of the deterioration of boundaries; *enmeshment* and *merging* are terms that express the same phenomenon that Eliot's use of *self-abnegation* and *sympathy* do.

Throughout this discussion, we have continually witnessed the divergence between the viewpoints of Eliot and the psychoanalysts, of morality and science. From the moral viewpoint, science has its place as an interesting but not essential pursuit. Increasing

knowledge is a good thing, but of paramount importance are the choices we make every day which affect our own lives and those of others. Morality characteristically distinguishes right action from wrong; it prescribes right action. The moral focus is on individual action. As individuals we have choices: actions can be right or wrong because we are not *isolated* individuals but members of a community. Regulating individual action for the good of the community is the main emphasis of the moral point of view. The important criterion for choice and action is relevance to our lives; whatever can enable us to live the best life we can within our community is most worthy of our attention.

For science, morality is merely a tool we require in order to maintain harmonious relations among ourselves. It is a political construct. But the scientific project, the delineation and extension of knowledge is the important thing. Our overarching goal is to develop our knowledge of *how* the universe works, to analyze and explain reality. In the prosecution of this project, science attempts to maintain an objective, neutral stance (though in the last century scientists have begun to realize that a totally value-free objectivity is unattainable by human beings, who are inevitably products of cultural value systems). Its discourse is that of description and analysis. Knowing the whole—that goal helps us transcend the triviality of our mundane lives. Who we are as individuals is not as important; neither is the community except as either can contribute to the ongoing project of the pursuit of knowledge.

These two approaches, akin to Arnold's Hebraism and Hellenism, seem irreconcilable in their diverse aims and the values that inform them. However, Marian Evans herself

seems not to have experienced much of a conflict, for she incorporated both viewpoints in her own mental life. The focus in this work is her emphasis on moral values, an emphasis which is prominent in all her fiction and most of her nonfiction as well. In her own reading she took up fiction only rarely, being much more interested in nonfiction on various topics, many of them scientific. Marian was keenly interested in science; she actively assisted her partner George Henry Lewes in his scientific experimentation and was the primary reader of his scientific writing. After his death she edited and saw through the press the last volume of his unfinished *Problems of Life and Mind*; this volume was on psychology. The psychology of the mid-to-late Victorian period was more physiologically based than the psychology developed by Freud and his successors. Marian Evans would probably have said that science's ability to teach us about ourselves does not warrant a neutral view towards human action which affects to relieve us of the responsibility to act in accordance with our moral standards. Thus her novels are all morality tales, many, like *Daniel Deronda*, concerning the moral deadness of egotism and the joy of a new birth into loving human fellowship.

NOTES

¹ In her article “What George Eliot Knew: Woman and Power in *Daniel Deronda*,” Roslyn Belkin identifies both Gwendolen’s narcissism (475) and Daniel’s moral mentorship (476). In addition, she makes the telling point that it is Gwendolen and Eliot’s other mentees “who must be morally purified, not the society which destroys them” (473).

² In his article “The Education of Gwendolen Harleth,” Laurence Lerner has glanced at a psychoanalytic perspective of the mentoring process (or “conversion” process as he puts it) that Gwendolen undergoes with the guidance of Daniel. He recognizes that “Deronda’s relationship with Gwendolen offers plenty of parallels to that of psychoanalyst and patient” (361). He tracks the development of the relationship but appears to accept the mentoring process uncritically, agreeing with Eliot that Gwendolen is better off in the end for having undergone it.

³ See Peggy Fitzhugh Johnstone’s *The Transformation of Rage* for an in-depth analysis of narcissism in George Eliot’s life and works. Chapter 7 is devoted to Gwendolen as narcissist. I differ from Johnstone’s conclusion that Gwendolen is restored to health by the end of the novel.

⁴ I am indebted to I/O psychologist Elizabeth Baker for this insight.

⁵ Eliot emphasizes the association of Daniel with the severe angel image by anticipating this passage in an earlier passage of narration concerning him which depicts an action almost identical: “[W]hen he dared to think of his own future, he saw it lying far away from this splendid sad-hearted creature [Gwendolen], who, because he had once

been impelled to arrest her attention momentarily, *as he might have seized her arm with warning to hinder her from stepping where there was danger*, had turned to him with a beseeching persistent need” (501, ch. 48; italics added).

⁶ Hetty and Rosamond are so much more extreme in their egotism than Gwendolen that they participate in the mentoring experience only briefly or superficially. I consider Hetty in Chapter 5. In Chapter 7 I discuss Rosamond, the most incorrigible of them all, who is completely untouched by her would-be mentor Lydgate. Rosamond, nevertheless, undergoes a fleeting mentor-mentee moment, submitting for a short time to the mentorship of Dorothea. This is one of the mentoring relationships that I do not otherwise consider in this study.

⁷ Eliot takes some little pains to try to establish Daniel as a rounded character with both flaws and virtues; for instance, she describes the irritation he feels at others’ assuming he is “sinless” (397; ch. 37). However, for various reasons, Eliot fails to create a realistic, full-bodied characterization in Daniel. Therefore, this irritation and most of his other emotions are unconvincing; what we are then left with is an overwhelming sense of the woodenness of his perfection. See Carole Robinson’s cogent analysis of the rigidity of Daniel’s characterization in “The Severe Angel: A Study of *Daniel Deronda*.”

⁸ Mirror imagery in connection with Gwendolen appears fifteen times in *Daniel Deronda*. In two of the most significant instances, Gwendolen’s moral progress is shown. In the first, by depicting her walking through the drawing room “not recognizing herself in the glass panels” (504; ch. 48), Eliot indicates that Gwendolen’s vision is less focused now on herself. In the second, awaiting Daniel’s arrival, she sees in the mirror

that “her head on its white pillar of a neck showed to advantage” (520; ch. 48). In an access of becoming modesty, she rushes to her boudoir and uses the mirror there as she ties a piece of lace over her hair “so as completely to conceal her neck” (520; ch. 48). Eliot labels this action a “manifest contempt of appearance” (520; ch. 48), another sign that Gwendolen, according to Eliot, is abandoning her egotism.

CHAPTER 4

CATERINA SARTI AND JANET DEMPSTER: THE EARLY INNOCENT MENTEES

The first examples of the mentoring relationship in George Eliot's fiction appear as early as the second and third stories of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" and "Janet's Repentance." These two relationships, between Maynard Gilfil and Caterina Sarti in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" and between Edgar Tryan and Janet Dempster in "Janet's Repentance," do not conform in all respects to the major mentor-mentee pattern that Eliot later develops, but they anticipate it in significant ways. The foremost differences that these two *Scenes* stories present are their overt emphasis on sympathy and the absence of egotism in the mentees. The *Scenes* relationships foreshadow the later mentor-mentee relationships in two ways. First, both *Scenes* mentees confess real or imagined guilt to their mentors in scenes clearly meant to be pivotal to their development. Such confession scenes are central to the mentor-mentee relationships of Dinah-Hetty in *Adam Bede* and Daniel-Gwendolen in *Daniel Deronda*. Secondly, a passage in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" presents the reader with a rudimentary form of what becomes for some later mentees the widening experience in which they realize that they are only insignificant specks in a vast universe. *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* are the primary later narratives which contain this feature involving the mentees Rosamond and Gwendolen. I will discuss this second feature more extensively at the end of the chapter. With the appearance of both of these features in George Eliot's last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, the mentoring pattern is brought virtually full circle in her fiction, with certain modifications along the way.

Eliot's narrators in the *Scenes* stories set forth a doctrine of sympathy, revealing that Eliot at this early point conceives sympathy as at the heart of the mentoring relationship. Sympathy, a cardinal virtue for Eliot, still plays a part in the later mentoring relationships, but its presentation is more muted. By contrast, a quotation from "Janet's Repentance" will show the pointed approach which that story's narrative discussion gives to the theme of sympathy:

Then poor Janet poured forth her sad tale of temptation and despondency; and even while she was confessing she felt half her burthen [*sic.*] removed. The act of confiding in human sympathy, the consciousness that a fellow-being was listening to her with patient pity, prepared her soul for that stronger leap by which faith grasps the idea of the Divine sympathy. When Mr Tryan spoke words of consolation and encouragement, she could now believe the message of mercy; the water-floods that had threatened to overwhelm her rolled back again, and life once more spread its heaven-covered space before her. She had been unable to pray alone; but now his prayer bore her own soul along with it, as the broad tongue of flame carries upwards in its vigorous leap the little flickering fire that could hardly keep alight by itself. (397; ch. 25)

Sympathy between two "fellow-beings" is the vital dynamic here. Despite the seemingly Christian setting Eliot has given her story, she is making a point about religion in a manner very close to that of her own mentor Feuerbach. In his philosophy, human beings have no access to the divine except through their contact with other human beings. Human beings, in fact, *are* divine in Feuerbach's view. The passage quoted above

accords with this view: Janet can neither believe nor pray without the human mediation provided by Mr. Tryan. The human mediator who purveys divine sympathy resembles the Roman Catholic perspective on the role of the priest as a human being ordained by God to minister to the ordinary folk above whom he is now elevated by virtue of his vocation and ordination. The priest thus occupies the middle ground in his role as mediator between God and his people. However, in Protestant fashion, Eliot is emphatic in these *Scenes* stories that the human mediator she writes about—her mentor—must be a peer to the one ministered to. He must be a fellow sinner who can bring the spark of divine love to a soul in need because he himself has experienced that need.

In most of the subsequent mentor-mentee relationships, in which the mentee's main flaw is an egotism which prevents her from having any sympathy for others, Eliot moves away from this requirement that mentor and mentee be peers. Egotism is so repugnant a mental state to Eliot's mind that she insensibly elevates her later mentors to a level of distinct moral superiority over their mentees. The prementoring egotism which afflicts these mentees marks them as a lower form of moral life since Eliot sees moral sensibility as one of the most highly evolved faculties of human life. Eliot finds it quite difficult to offer sympathy to anyone who cannot offer it to anyone else. As a result, in the later mentor-mentee narratives, there is less emphasis on sympathizing with the mentee and more concern with setting her straight.

Caterina and Janet, George Eliot's first mentees, are not egotists. Caterina is in a

deep depression because of false guilt over an intention to murder her faithless lover. Janet is an alcoholic, and Mr. Tryan's mentoring helps her overcome her addiction. Eliot presents both characters as lost souls in need of the rescue that their mentors provide. Caterina, it is true, is a self-absorbed character. However, on the basis of her being a young foreign woman of not exceptional intelligence and a dependent in a wealthy English baronet's family, Eliot's narrator as well as the members of Sir Christopher Cheverel's family cover her with a thick overlay of condescension. Thus Caterina's self-absorption is treated as something as paltry and trivial as she is; it is not acknowledged to have the weightiness of egotism. Janet is still less culpable and is therefore treated by Eliot with a good deal more respect than Caterina receives. Janet is a generous and loving person even before entering the mentoring process: she makes it a regular habit to visit the sick and poor among her neighbors. Her intrinsic dignity is emphasized in descriptions of grandeur of form often conveyed by plant imagery: "her rich pale beauty [is] like a tall white arum that has just unfolded its grand pure curves to the sun" (285; ch. 4). She has been driven to drinking by the physical and emotional abuse of her husband. "They can't help themselves, poor things," is a phrase that can be applied to Eliot's first two mentees in a way that would not apply to any of her others.

The confessions that Caterina and Janet make to their mentors constitute one of the major links between Eliot's early mentoring relationships and the following ones, particularly Dinah-Hetty and Daniel-Gwendolen. In their confessions the two *Scenes* characters open their souls to the understanding ears of mentors who have experienced pain like the pain they are revealing. Before the confession the *Scenes* mentee feels

isolated from human concern. In the process of confessing and receiving loving acceptance, condolence, and guidance from the mentor, the mentee is connected to the human world of her fellows. George Eliot treats this process of connection almost as if it were a sacrament: in her humanistic worldview informed by social organicism, the restoration of an alienated soul to the human community is indeed a sacred event. The two lost lambs from *Scenes* are easily brought back into the fold.

The self-absorbed Caterina is not taken seriously enough by the narrator to be considered an egotist. The condescending attitude taken towards her by narrator and characters alike is shown primarily in the proliferation of diminutives and animal images by which she is addressed and described. As Thomas A. Noble points out, countless times the narrator will preface Caterina's name with the epithet "poor, little" or variations thereof (137). The narrator and characters use an array of animal images to describe Caterina, from "grasshopper" to "pet squirrel" to "poor wounded leveret" (Noble 137-39). Sir Christopher's favorite term is "little black-eyed monkey" while the narrator most often refers to her as a bird, for instance as a "little southern bird." *Black-eyed* and *southern* refer to Caterina's Italian origin; the text breathes the strong odor of an insular English sense of superiority over other Europeans. This condescension diminishes Caterina and seems to excuse her from being responsible for her own actions. Thus the first mentoring narrative in Eliot's fiction sidesteps the issue of the egotist's reform, which is at the heart of many of her later treatments of the mentoring theme.

The mentoring process is, therefore, shorter and simpler in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story." Caterina has been driven to distraction by a trifling lover; in her jealous rage she decides

to kill him. She reaches him with the dagger in her pocket just after he has suffered a heart attack. Caterina's great shock consists in seeing "[her] wish outside [her]" (Eliot, *Deronda* 596; ch. 56). Caterina believes she herself has killed her lover Anthony. In great consternation she runs away to a former servant's house. She becomes profoundly depressed. Her mentor Maynard comes to restore her spirit. She confesses to him and receives his sympathetic ministrations, but the depression remains. Only the power of music is able to bring Caterina out of the depths. Caterina's restoration to health is presented almost miraculously. This results in more of a fairy-tale quality than is present in any of the mentoring narratives that follow. It also results in a mentee who is incapable of being an active participant in her mentoring experience and a mentor with only limited agency.

In other respects, however, Caterina's narrative resembles Eliot's last mentoring fiction: *Daniel Deronda*. In both narratives the mentee is overwhelmed by rage towards another: the faithless lover in "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" and the tyrannical husband in *Daniel Deronda*. The mentee's rage in each story leads to the murderous intention, which, in the face of the longed-for death, the mentee conflates with actual guilt. The description of Caterina's rage reflects Eliot's dehumanizing presentation of the character as illustrated by the following passage:

See how [Caterina] rushes noiselessly, like a pale meteor, along the passages and up the gallery stairs! Those gleaming eyes, those bloodless lips, that swift silent tread, make her look like the incarnation of a fierce purpose, rather than a womanYes, there are sharp weapons in the gallery. There is a dagger in that cabinet;

she knows it well. And as a dragon-fly wheels in its flight to alight for an instant on a leaf, she darts to the cabinet, takes out the dagger, and thrusts it into her pocket. . . .She threads the windings of the plantations, not feeling the golden leaves that rain upon her, not feeling the earth beneath her feet. Her hand is in her pocket, clenching the handle of the dagger, which she holds half out of its sheath. (211-12; ch. 13)

In this passage the narrator compares Caterina to two nonhuman entities: a meteor and a dragonfly. These comparisons are accompanied by the statement that she looks more like “the incarnation of a fierce purpose” than a woman. All of these similes and the references to body parts (for example, “bloodless lips”) tend to depersonalize Caterina. The depersonalization in turn robs this depiction of her rage of the intensity that an “inside,” psychological view could give. Eliot takes the psychological perspective in her later treatment of Gwendolen’s rage as can be seen in the following lengthy passage in which Gwendolen confesses to Daniel:

“All sorts of contrivances in my mind—but all so difficult. And I fought against them—I was terrified at them—I saw his dead face”—here her voice sank almost to a whisper close to Deronda’s ear—“ever so long ago I saw it; and I wished him to be dead. And yet it terrified me. I was like two creatures. I could not speak—I wanted to kill—it was as strong as thirst—and then directly—I felt beforehand I had done something dreadful, unalterable—that would make me like an evil spirit. And it came—it came. . . .

“It had all been in my mind when I first spoke to you—when we were at the Abbey. I had done something then. I could not tell you that. It was the only thing I did towards carrying out my thoughts. They went about over everything; but they all remained like dreadful dreams—all but one. I did one act—and I never undid it—it is there still—as long ago as when we were at Ryelands. There it was—something my fingers longed for among the beautiful toys in the cabinet in my boudoir—small and sharp, like a long willow leaf in a silver sheath. I locked it in the drawer of my dressing-case. I was continually haunted with it, and how I should use it. I fancied myself putting it under my pillow. But I never did. I never looked at it again. I dared not unlock the drawer: it had a key all to itself; and not long ago, when we were in the yacht, I dropped the key into the deep water. It was my wish to drop it and deliver myself. After that I began to think how I could open the drawer without the key; and when I found we were to stay in Genoa, it came into my mind that I could get it opened privately at the hotel. But then, when we were going up the stairs, I met you; and I thought I should talk to you alone and tell you this—everything I could not tell you in town; and then I was forced to go out in the boat.” (592-93; ch. 56)

Gwendolen’s fragmented first-person account of the vacillating struggle she has undergone with her rage lends a vivid, personal quality that is missing in the passage from “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story.” This is the case even though the Gwendolen who is speaking no longer experiences the rage but only guilt and exhaustion.

Both Caterina and Gwendolen believe themselves responsible for the deaths of lover and husband. Both deaths occur fortuitously when the mentees are at the emotional pitch of the intent to murder. It is as if Eliot wanted these two mentees to get the full benefit of the psychological experience of guilt without incurring the need for punishment for an actual crime. Perhaps she considered a mentee guilty of an actual crime too irredeemable. After all, the only mentee who actually commits a crime, Hetty, is exiled from the community: she dies a transported criminal far away from England.

In the case of both Caterina and Gwendolen, it is the mentor's role to reassure the mentee that she is not guilty of the crime of murder in spite of her fantasies and intentions. Maynard attenuates Caterina's guilt after he hears her confession, insisting that she never would have gone through with her intention. He comforts her with the revelation that she is not alone in her temptations by telling her of his own struggles. He redistributes the guilt, blaming Anthony because he provoked Caterina's murderous rage and himself, claiming that if he had been in Caterina's place, he would actually have killed Anthony. Caterina is thus left blameless, and her blamelessness is reinforced by the typically Christian paradox of her clinging to the sense of her sinfulness, a sign of a sinner who is closer to redemption than one who will not admit guilt. Eliot finds this easy solution unsatisfactory by the time she is bringing Gwendolen's story to a conclusion. Gwendolen, too, is mistaken in believing that she has killed her husband Grandcourt, but her real guilt lies in her egotism, and for that she pays a severe penalty.

Though Caterina does not become completely healed of her depression until she is awakened by the sound of music, her confession to Maynard and his loving consolation

begin the process. Like Edgar Tryan and Daniel Deronda, Maynard is described as an angel, in Maynard's case as Caterina's "guardian angel" (238; ch. 20). Daniel is called not a "guardian angel" but a "severe angel" (658; ch. 65), in keeping with his function of chastising Gwendolen for her egotism. In pale anticipation of Daniel's severity, Maynard gently chides Caterina for not having noticed a little girl who has brought her crocuses to her bedside. Enjoining Caterina to notice the girl when she comes again, he begins directing Caterina outwards, away from herself. Though she is partially restored to health, Caterina remains in a "motionless reverie" (240; ch. 20) until music wakes her.

As if to throw herself back into the realism her early fiction-writing creed espouses, Eliot follows "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" with a tale so grimly naturalistic that her publisher John Blackwood complained of the unseemliness of the depiction of a woman "driven . . . to so unsentimental a resource as beer" (344). Janet's drinking problem provides the situation of need out of which the mentoring relationship is formed. Mr. Tryan's mentoring of Janet is successful because he talks to her "like a brother" (329; ch. 11). Overhearing Mr. Tryan speaking one day in sympathetic confidence to a sick congregant, Janet receives her first intimation that he might be able to give her the help she needs:

Janet was surprised, and forgot her wish not to encounter Mr Tryan; the tone and the words were so unlike what she had expected to hear. There was none of the self-satisfied unction of the teacher, quoting, or exhorting, or expounding, for the benefit of the hearer, but a simple appeal for help, a confession of weakness. Mr Tryan had his deeply-felt troubles, then? Mr Tryan, too, like herself, knew

what it was to tremble at a foreseen trial—to shudder at an impending burthen [*sic.*], heavier than he felt able to bear?

The most brilliant deed of virtue could not have inclined Janet's good-will towards Mr Tryan so much as this fellowship in suffering, and the softening thought was in her eyes when he appeared in the doorway, pale, weary, and depressed. (331; ch. 12)

As mentioned earlier, the “fellowship in suffering” between mentor and mentee is a central feature of these early relationships. Janet, especially, remains untouched and unconvinced by any attempt to help her on the part of anyone who has not also suffered as she has.

Mr. Tryan proves his eligibility to be her counselor by responding to her confession with a counter-confession of his own. By way of introducing Mr. Tryan's confession, Eliot's narrator editorializes about the proper method of administering sympathy:

[Mr. Tryan] saw that the first thing Janet needed was to be assured of sympathy. She must be made to feel that her anguish was not strange to him; that he entered into the only half-expressed secrets of her spiritual weakness, before any other message of consolation could find its way to her heart. The tale of the Divine Pity was never yet believed from lips that were not felt to be moved by human pity. And Janet's anguish was not strange to Mr Tryan. He had never been in the presence of a sorrow and a self-despair that had sent so strong a thrill through all the recesses of his saddest experience; and it is because sympathy is but a living again through our own past in a new form, that confession often prompts a

response of confession. Mr Tryan felt this prompting, and his judgement, too, told him that in obeying it he would be taking the best means of administering comfort to Janet. (358; ch. 18)

The narrator postulates here that sympathy has a vital link to memory. The inference can be drawn that, in the connection made between two people by sympathy, each is enabled to discover with a newfound clarity his or her own identity and to offer it to the other in the honesty of confession. The biographical root for this dynamic in Eliot's fiction is to be found in Mary Ann Evans' Evangelical practice of baring her soul to God through daily self-examination and self-offering. In her new humanism, the baring of soul occurs between human beings, but Eliot's tone in this passage makes it clear that the sense of the sacred remains for her.

Mr. Tryan makes his confession, revealing to Janet that he has been a sinner of even greater proportion than Janet has, for he has, in his thoughtless youth, led a young woman astray and thereby contributed to her downfall as a prostitute who seeks a way out through suicide. Interestingly, Mr. Tryan discloses that he himself, in a moment of deep despair, has confessed his own sin and sorrow to a sympathetic friend: “‘At last . . . I found a friend to whom I opened all my feelings—to whom I confessed everything. He was a man who had gone through very deep experience, and could understand the different wants of different minds’” (360-61; ch. 18). The passage affords a glimpse of a chain of confessors and penitents reaching back in time like a humanistic apostolic succession leading back to the first human being who sympathized with another.

The sympathetic connections established between the *Scenes* mentors and mentees is

so symbiotic a link that both mentees display a marked dependence on their mentors once the relationships are begun. Immediately prior to the scene which presents Maynard and Caterina's wedding, the narrator makes this comment about Caterina and her need for Maynard: "The delicate-tendrilled plant must have something to cling to" (241; ch. 20). Similarly, Janet's dependence on Mr. Tryan is expressed in passages like the following: "Mr Tryan, she knew, would pray for her. If she felt herself failing, she would confess it to him at once; if her feet began to slip, there was that stay for her to cling to" (385; ch. 24). In another passage Janet is likened to "a little child whose hand is firmly grasped by its father" (398; ch. 25). This clinging dependence is a feature that appears in several of the later mentor-mentee relationships, especially Daniel-Gwendolen as we have seen. Janet's story, like Caterina's, is, in many ways, a telescoped version of Gwendolen's. Daniel Deronda will later echo Mr. Tryan's reflection that Janet's "fear [of yielding to the temptation to drink] is her greatest security" ("Janet's Repentance" 377; ch. 22) when he counsels Gwendolen to let her fear inhibit her from further slips into selfishness (*Deronda* 388; ch. 36). However, Eliot's treatment of the dependent mentee is moderate in *Scenes*; it is in *Daniel Deronda* that the mentee's dependence reaches the depths of abjection.

George Eliot most assuredly reaps a bountiful moral harvest from the tears sown by her mentees. Most of her mentees, even these early "innocent" mentees, show an admirable moral recovery as a result of their mentoring experiences. In a scene that looks forward to the change in *Felix Holt's* Esther to a new loving consideration of her father, Janet vows that she will become "a good tender child" (365; ch. 19) to her mother. Such

an anguished resolve is puzzling to the reader, who has not been given any more indication that Janet has been a “bad” daughter to her mother, Mrs. Raynor, than a scene in which Janet pours out to her mother her understandable distress over her husband’s treatment of her (337-39; ch. 14). As Janet, from the beginning of the narrative, is a kind person whose conduct is marred only by her drinking, there is not much else besides this for her mentor to work on. He does help her resist the overmastering temptation of drink. After Mr. Tryan has helped Janet weather an especially difficult episode of temptation, which she makes the subject of her second confession to him, she experiences a spiritual uplifting as well: “That walk [back from her talk with Mr. Tryan] in the dewy starlight remained for ever in Janet’s memory as one of those baptismal epochs, when the soul, dipped in the sacred waters of joy and peace, rises from them with new energies, with more unalterable longings” (398; ch. 25). Always for George Eliot, the moral *is* the spiritual. Though the *Scenes* stories use a Christian stage dressing, what Eliot means when she states that a mentee has experienced a “baptismal epoch” is that she has become a person of greater moral strength now that she has experienced the “joy and peace” of reconnection with the community through the offices of her mentor.

The peace that both these mentees receive through the process of their mentoring is a kind of quiescence that seems to indicate that they have given up the world and are simply waiting to die. Janet’s experience is that “she [has] tasted the sweet pure air of trust and penitence and submission” (385; ch. 24). Eliot’s account of Caterina’s submission to Maynard is even more explicit. On her wedding day, against a background of burgeoning springtime life, Caterina is described like this: “The little face was still

pale, and there was a subdued melancholy in it, as of one who sups with friends for the last time, and has his ear open for the signal that will call him away” (241; ch. 21).

Caterina fulfills expectations by dying not too long afterwards. Janet is still living at the end of her story, but Eliot has enshrined her as Mr. Tryan’s living headstone:

There is a simple gravestone in Milby Churchyard, telling that in this spot lie the remains of Edgar Tryan. . . .It is a meagre memorial, and tells you simply that the man who lies there took upon him, faithfully or unfaithfully, the office of guide and instructor to his fellow-men.

But there is another memorial of Edgar Tryan, which bears a fuller record: it is Janet Dempster, rescued from self-despair, strengthened with divine hopes, and now looking back on years of purity and helpful labour. (412; ch. 28)

Trust, submission, penitence, and purity are the qualities of soul that all Eliot’s mentors impart to their mentees. Such qualities require the self to shrink and withdraw from the act of asserting its vitality. It is thus that these mentees, having abandoned their isolating self-absorption, can dissolve their individuality into the larger life of the community.

To most of the later mentees Eliot gives a harder, starker form of isolation from the community in the form of their egotism. The egotism of some of the later mentees is broken through with a kind of epiphany—or epoch, to use Eliot’s term—a realization of their own insignificance in view of the vastness of the world beyond them. In the later mentoring narratives which use this device, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, the mentees see at last the falsity and presumption of their egotism and begin to move beyond it into a greater concern for the welfare of others in their communities. The

Scenes mentees, who do not qualify as hardened egotists, do not experience the mentoring process as such a difficult ordeal as do the later mentees. Accordingly, the example from “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story” that resembles such later passages is one comprised only of narrative commentary; Caterina plays no conscious or active part:

While [Caterina’s] poor little heart was being bruised with a weight too heavy for it, Nature was holding on her calm inexorable way, in unmoved and terrible beauty. The stars were rushing in their eternal courses; the tides swelled to the level of the last expectant weed; the sun was making brilliant day to busy nations on the other side of the swift earth. The stream of human thought and deed was hurrying and broadening onward. The astronomer was at his telescope; the great ships were labouring over the waves; the toiling eagerness of commerce, the fierce spirit of revolution, were only ebbing in brief rest; and sleepless statesmen were dreading the possible crisis of the morrow. What were our little Tina and her trouble in this mighty torrent, rushing from one awful unknown to another? Lighter than the smallest centre of quivering life in the waterdrop, hidden and uncared for as the pulse of anguish in the breast of the tiniest bird that has fluttered down to its nest with the long-sought food, and has found the nest torn and empty. (177; ch. 5)

The primary function of this passage in “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story,” which actually occurs before Caterina’s mentoring begins, is to underscore the condescension discussed earlier with which Caterina (or Tina) is treated by all characters as well as the narrator. The extended simile at the end dehumanizes Caterina, linking her with nature, specifically

animal life. Furthermore, while the passage makes the same point shared with later mentor-mentee narratives that the individual is insignificant vis-à-vis the wide world that she inhabits, Caterina has no consciousness of this perspective. The mentoring process does nothing to change this. The boundaries of her small world of self remain as circumscribed as ever. Her unawareness of the larger world beyond self shows that Eliot has not given her even the capacity for growth, and Caterina shrinks appropriately into death.

The capacity for growth is a quality Eliot demands of her later mentees. She holds them responsible for their actions in ways that are not apparent in her treatment of the *Scenes* mentees, especially Caterina. To view the entire circuit of this theme of the insignificant individual in the vastness of the universe as Eliot applies it to her mentees, we can contrast the passage from “Mr. Gilfil’s Love-Story” above to the following passage from *Daniel Deronda*:

The world seemed getting larger round poor Gwendolen, and she more solitary and helpless in the midst. The thought that [Daniel] might come back after going to the East, sank before the bewildering vision of [his] wide-stretching purposes in which she felt herself reduced to a mere speck. There comes a terrible moment to many souls when the great movements of the world, the larger destinies of mankind, which have lain aloof in newspapers and other neglected reading, enter like an earthquake into their own lives—when the slow urgency of growing generations turns into the tread of an invading army or the dire clash of civil war, and grey fathers know nothing to seek for but the corpses of their blooming sons,

and girls forget all vanity to make lint and bandages which may serve for the shattered limbs of their betrothed husbands. . . .Then it is that the submission of the soul to the Highest is tested, and even in the eyes of frivolity life looks out from the scene of human struggle with the awful face of duty, and a religion shows itself which is something else than a private consolation.

That was the sort of crisis which was at this moment beginning in Gwendolen's small life: she was for the first time feeling the pressure of a vast mysterious movement, for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world. . . . (688-89; ch. 69)

By the end of her novel-writing career, Eliot is no longer focusing so much on the passive role of the realistic artist who simply reports "faithfully" what she sees. Such was her artistic aim in her early fiction, especially *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede*.¹ By the time she wrote *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot was frankly calling for social reform (Shuttleworth 175). She can no longer be content with a mentee like Caterina, who, like a bedraggled stray kitten, needs a pitying rescue but who is unable to grow in moral stature. Gwendolen, Eliot's last mentee, is expected to shed her entire moral skin, transforming herself from self-serving egotist into self-abnegating humanist.

Considering the differences between Eliot's early mentees and the later ones, it is striking that strong parallels should exist between the *Scenes* narratives and *Daniel Deronda* in particular. That Eliot returned to the mentoring theme again and again over the entire course of her fiction-writing career is an indication that it was artistically compelling for her. Janet's mentor, who is likened to the angel who came to release St.

Peter and the other apostles from prison (409, ch. 27; Acts 5: 19), preaches the same doctrine of “entire submission, perfect resignation” (362; ch. 18) that the later mentors preach. Though Janet is not an egotist like Gwendolen and other later mentees, the message she receives from Mr. Tryan makes a move toward the ideal Eliot will hold out to her later mentees: the abnegation of self, which she sees as a deliverance from the narrowness she perceives in egotism. One problematic outcome of this “teaching” is that through it, Eliot tries to aver that mentees should give up their selves altogether. Throughout her life, Eliot remained profoundly committed to what she perceived as the truth of Christ’s exhortation, “‘If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’” (Mk. 8: 34, *RSV*). Once she became a humanist, she understood the goal as following Christ only insofar as he was understood to represent human moral perfection. In striving to realize in her mentoring narratives this vision of moral excellence, however, Eliot endorses a way of life that is conducive to psychopathology.

NOTES

ⁱ *Adam Bede* represents a bridge in George Eliot's fiction from her early aim of accurate reporting to her later aim of presenting an ideal model. While she espouses faithful mimeticism in the narrative commentary of her first full-length novel (primarily in the well-known Chapter 17), she also introduces her first egotistic heroine, Hetty.

CHAPTER 5

GENDER MODIFICATIONS: STRONG WOMEN, PITIFUL MEN

The standard gender distinction in the mentoring relationships is one in which the male mentor is portrayed as strong, wise, and morally superior to the female mentee, whose qualities of weakness, ignorance, and moral poverty complement his by contrast. George Eliot does, however, present several mentoring relationships which do not fit this standard pattern in some way, whether by a simple reversal of genders or a polarity between two characters of the same sex. I will examine in some depth in this chapter three representative gender-modified relationships, one from each of three novels: Dinah-Hetty from *Adam Bede*, Mary-Fred from *Middlemarch*, and Dolly-Silas from *Silas Marner*.

Eliot's basic mentoring pattern, in presenting a male mentor and a female mentee, fits neatly into conventional Victorian gender stereotypes. The male, as the "normative" sex, represented the fullness of human perfection. All that was good in human nature and human potential was ascribed to him: strength, wisdom, integrity, intelligence, creativity—all these were considered his prerogative and domain. On the other hand, the female, "the second sex," was considered the embodiment of human weakness, ignorance, and degradation.¹ In her basic mentoring relationships Eliot seems to endorse such a convention. The mentoring situation, in which a woman is in moral error and needs the guidance of a man, heightens the conventional terms of differentiation between the sexes. Eliot's mentees are typically women who are strikingly impoverished in their moral sensibility and who, therefore, need men of striking moral integrity to lead them

out of self-centeredness and into loving participation in the community. In such scenarios Eliot seems to concur that males represent a perfection that females can only lack. Admittedly, many of these women are portrayed as successfully completing the mentoring process and successfully embracing service to their communities. Her presentation of many female mentees makes it clear that she believed women capable of aspiring to the moral height that the male mentors represent, but, because the mentees typically remain dependent on their mentors, they retain an air of being moral apprentices to the end. They never become the moral exemplars that the mentors are.

In two of the gender-modified relationships covered in this chapter, the female mentor is just as strong, wise, and morally estimable as any of the typical male mentors.² Dinah Morris of *Adam Bede* and Mary Garth of *Middlemarch* are women who, by virtue of their sound upbringings and native strength of character, have managed to escape being caught up in the egotistic vanity that preoccupies many of the female mentees. Dinah is a Methodist lay preacher who lives her religious faith in service to others. Dinah's mentee, Hetty Sorrel, is a typical female mentee in her vain, shallow self-centeredness. This pair, therefore, demonstrates a contrast between female excellence and female culpability. Mary avoids self-pretentiousness and vanity by maintaining a strong sense of humor about life, including herself. At the same time, she holds high moral standards; she is a down-to-earth touchstone of honest virtue in Eliot's fiction. Mary's mentee is Fred Vincy, whose feckless optimism makes him a comic figure. Silas Marner, from the third pair, is a comic male figure as well; his timid simplicity feminizes him. Eliot enhances the mentoring comedy in *Silas Marner* by teaming Silas with a

female mentor, Dolly Winthrop, who is as ingenuous as her mentee. In a gentle parody of the mentoring relationship in Eliot's Wordsworthian fairy tale, mentor and mentee, both innocents, guided by nature, find their way to spiritual harmony.

Eliot's use of nature in these three mentoring narratives provides an additional common thread. In *Adam Bede* nature is used as a language which spells out moral baseness in the characterization of Hetty; Dinah, by contrast, is shown, in her moral excellence, to have transcended nature. In *Middlemarch* Fred is presented as a model of Feuerbach's religious man. Eliot agrees with Feuerbach that the egotism fostered by Christianity and other theistic religions is deplorable, but she diverges from her mentor's belief that humanity should be considered a subordinate part of the natural world. She persists in separating humanity from nature when it comes to moral issues. In *Silas Marner* Eliot takes a pleasant detour from the serious moral concerns she undertakes in her other novels. Her mentee Silas is presented as having become isolated from the community not through his own egotism but through the wrongdoing of others. Therefore, Eliot does not need to stage a moral rescue. In company again with her mentors Wordsworth and Feuerbach, she turns instead to nature in order to provide a healing restoration for Silas.

Dinah is Eliot's premier example of the strong, wise woman as mentor. She is sympathetic, like the mentors from *Scenes of Clerical Life*. When Hetty is in trouble, pregnant and running away from the shame of discovery, she thinks of Dinah as a possible refuge:

Suppose she were to go to Dinah, and ask her to help her? Dinah did not think about things as other people did; she was a mystery to Hetty, but Hetty knew she was always kind. She couldn't imagine Dinah's face turning away from her in dark reproof or scorn, Dinah's voice willingly speaking ill of her, or rejoicing in her misery as a punishment. Dinah did not seem to belong to that world of Hetty's, whose glance she dreaded like scorching fire. (382-83; ch. 37)

Dinah's sympathy towards her mentee provides a link of continuity with the early stories despite the fact that, in *Adam Bede*, Eliot is already beginning to portray her mentee as an egotist in the same way that she does in most of the rest of her fiction. Another similarity between *Scenes* and *Adam Bede* is in the contextualizing of Dinah's sympathy in a Christian setting and idiom. In her wholehearted commitment to her faith, Dinah seems, at least until the end of the novel, to have no needs or desires of her own except the desire to do God's will. Unlike Mary, Dinah is portrayed as almost flawless. In a famous parallel scene, Dinah and Hetty are shown in adjoining bedrooms. Dinah looks out a window overlooking a "wide view" (155; ch. 15), thinking not of herself but "of all the dear people whom she had learned to care for among these peaceful fields, and who would now have a place in her loving remembrance for ever" (156; ch. 15). Barbara Hardy points out that "this is the first appearance of the gaze through the window at the world outside, which we find significantly placed in *Felix Holt* and *Middlemarch*" (81). In the companion scenes in those two novels, a mentee learning to widen her view—Esther and Dorothea respectively—is at the window.

In the parallel scene in *Adam Bede*, while Dinah looks out the window, Hetty—anticipating Gwendolen—is admiring the effect of her reflection in two mirrors. In contrast to Dinah’s wide view, Eliot emphasizes Hetty’s narrowness of imagination. When Hetty is on her journey away from home, she is described this way: “Poor wandering Hetty, with the rounded childish face, and the hard unloving despairing soul looking out of it—with the narrow heart and narrow thoughts, no room in them for any sorrows but her own, and tasting that sorrow with the more intense bitterness!” (391; ch. 37). The egotistic mentee gazing at herself in the mirror is the ideal image for Eliot’s concepts not only of narcissism but of narrowness of mind. It comes down to the same thing. The only thing such a mentee has in view is herself; she misses completely, in consequence, the wider world beyond her.

The corollary of the mentee’s egotism is her indifference to having any meaningful link with the community. In the adjoining bedrooms scene, as Hetty struts before the mirror, imagining the future admiration of others, Eliot makes this connection clear:

Does any sweet or sad memory mingle with this dream of the future—any loving thought of her second parents—of the children she had helped to tend—or any youthful companion, any pet animal, any relic of her own childhood even? Not one. There are some plants that have hardly any roots: you may tear them from their native nook of rock or wall, and just lay them over your ornamental flowerpot, and they blossom none the worse. Hetty could have cast all her past life behind her and never cared to be reminded of it again. (153; ch. 15)

Eliot considers such rootless individualism to be a form of moral degeneracy. The primary danger posed by such a moral decline, in her opinion, is its corrosive action on humanity's precious collective heritage. Eliot expresses her conservative views most explicitly in her essay "Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt." In this essay, written at the time of the Reform Act of 1867, Eliot focuses on cautioning the working class against too hasty agitation for political rights. Sweeping reforms, she fears, might bring with them destruction of the societal inheritance that has been built up over centuries. This collective inheritance has been constructed chiefly by those who have had the material means sufficient to allow them the necessary education and leisure to develop "that treasure of knowledge, science, poetry, refinement of thought, feeling, and manners, great memories, and the interpretation of great records, which is carried on from the minds of one generation to the minds of another" (418). In the essay she does not address individualism *per se*, but her argument is linked to the crusade against egotistic individualism that she conducts in her novels. If an entire class must subordinate its demands to the good of society as a whole, the lone individual certainly cannot be considered to take precedence over the community. Here Eliot is in firm agreement with Feuerbach's discountenance of egotism.

In contrast to the egotistic mentees' moral degeneracy, the mentors' moral sublimity is linked with the more-than-merely-human as can be seen in some of the imagery Eliot employs in her depiction of Dinah's selflessness. Dinah is compared to a ghost, a corpse, and—like Daniel Deronda—an angel in various places in the text (110, ch. 10; 158, 160, ch. 15; 499, ch. 51). Early on, her facial expression is described as one "of unconscious

placid gravity—of absorption in thoughts that had no connection with the present moment or with her own personality. . .” (35; ch. 3). In a letter to Adam’s brother Seth, Dinah describes her experience of prayer: “‘I sit on my chair in the dark room and close my eyes, and it is as if I was out of the body and could feel no want for evermore’” (329; ch. 30). All these images make Dinah seem literally self-less—anything but a living, breathing human being. It is as if she has graduated from the ranks of humanity. After all, corpses and ghosts are what’s left when human life is over, and angels are one step and yet light years away from our sordid mortality. In the adjoining bedrooms scene, the previously parallel lines of action intersect when Hetty attracts Dinah’s attention—accidentally but significantly—by knocking her hand mirror to the floor. When Dinah appears at Hetty’s door, she (Dinah) is described as “almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love” (158; ch. 15). This last quote provides the key to Eliot’s characterization of Dinah as otherworldly. Dinah’s spirituality has elevated her to a sublime realm which transcends the narrow world of self that Hetty inhabits. She is thus ideally suited to return to benighted mortality to impart this “sublimer love” and to help raise them above their lowly level of moral development.

If Dinah has achieved the supernatural, Hetty, contained by her selfish concerns, is associated with the natural. George Eliot considers such a state of selfishness one of sterility though, paradoxically, she gives it an imagistic association with nature. Associating sterility with nature and fecundity with super-nature is an old current in Christian thought. Even as early as John’s gospel, the contrast between natural life and

supernatural life was being stated with a view to asserting the superiority of supernatural life. In that gospel Jesus is presented as saying, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst” (6: 35; *RSV*) and “This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever” (6: 58; *RSV*). Appropriating nature’s abundance as a symbol for the Christian life—minus sex, nature’s reproductive method—this line of thinking proclaimed a life better and “higher” than what nature could provide. Christians could be free from the privations and terrors of natural life. Nature was established as the province of the paramount terror—death and decay—while never-ending vitality was reserved for super-nature. By analogy, the “natural man” harbored in his heart the potential for evil—or spiritual death—and was tempted into it by the enemy of God, Satan. Only by turning from what was natural to the God who transcended nature and triumphed over evil could a person achieve the pristine glory of life everlasting. The humanist George Eliot was no longer interested in the metaphysical drama which saw human beings as the spoil of battle over which God and Satan contended. But she still conceived of the moral life—the struggle between good and evil—in these terms. Thus Dinah, who has dedicated herself to the goodness of fellow-feeling, is associated with a privileged super-nature; Hetty, who has no room for others in her narrow heart, is associated with a condemned nature.

Like Caterina, Hetty is described most often in animal imagery, usually young animals, such as kittens, ducklings, and calves (see, for example, 151, ch. 15; and 84-85, ch. 7); but Hetty’s outer beauty concealing inner ugliness is also compared to fruit

containing stones (152, ch. 15; 339, ch. 31). The implication of this association shows that Eliot is departing from her allegiances both to Wordsworth and to Feuerbach. From both of these mentors she had presumably learned to cherish nature and the human experience of embodiment. The contrasting imagery she employs to describe Dinah and Hetty, however, retains more of the Neoplatonic body-soul polarity of the Christian tradition. When Dinah appears to Hetty in the adjoining bedroom scene, she is described, as quoted above, as “a lovely corpse.” When she leaves Hetty, she goes “out of the room almost as quietly and quickly as if she had been a ghost. . .” (160; ch. 15). There is a Gnostic flavor to this apparition of Dinah’s resurrected corpse returning as a ghostly teacher to impart “sublimar secrets” to the elect initiate Hetty, who will be offered the privilege of being raised from the putrid earth to a higher realm where death can have no sway.

Eliot complicates Hetty’s association with the natural in one important passage:

Hetty would have been glad to hear that she should never see a child again; they were worse than the nasty little lambs that the shepherd was always bringing in to be taken special care of in lambing time; for the lambs *were* got rid of sooner or later. As for the young chickens and turkeys, Hetty would have hated the very word “hatching,” if her aunt had not bribed her to attend to the young poultry by promising her the proceeds of one out of every brood. The round downy chicks peeping out from under their mother’s wing never touched Hetty with any pleasure; that was not the sort of prettiness she cared about, but she did care about

the prettiness of the new things she would buy for herself at Treddleston fair with the money they fetched. (154; ch. 15)

Eliot's purpose in using the young animal imagery to describe Hetty is, in addition to the association with the natural, to show how deceiving an adorable physical appearance can be. At the beginning of the novel, no one except Mrs. Poyser is able to see past Hetty's outward beauty to the moral vacuousness within. Hetty may be as winsome to observe as the young animals she is compared to, but, because she lacks any kind of sympathy, the sight of those young animals does not elicit any feelings of affection within her. She values them only for their commercial potential; with the money she earns from their sale, she can buy for herself hair ribbons, gloves, and other articles of self-adornment. This passage reveals that Hetty hates the young animals she is constantly identified with throughout the text. A reasonable conclusion to this seeming contradiction is that the egotism that constricts Hetty's inner life has also created in her a state of self-alienation.

Hetty, like Gwendolen, is a pathological narcissist; she displays the narcissist's paradoxical self-hate masquerading as excessive self-love. The narcissist's behavior is characterized by the following traits (among others): "a grandiose sense of self-importance," a preoccupation "with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love." He or she "believes that he or she is 'special' and unique[,] . . . requires excessive admiration[, and] . . . has a sense of entitlement." A narcissist "is interpersonally exploitative[,] . . . lacks empathy[, and] . . . is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her." Finally, a narcissist "shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes" (*DSM-IV* 661). The source of the narcissist's strident

demands for love and attention on the apparent basis that he or she is entitled to them is the unconscious fear that he or she is, in reality, unworthy of receiving them.

This fear and the masking grandiose behavior are the terms of the narcissist's self-alienation. George Eliot's analysis of Hetty provides numerous examples of the masking grandiosity. In the parallel bedroom scene discussed above, Hetty indulges in fantasies of her life as a fine lady once Arthur Donnithorne rescues her from her forced association with the riffraff who constitute her family. She thinks with gloating pleasure how Mary Burge, one of the village girls, will envy her. Hetty's social position does not allow her much opportunity to be arrogant, but her response to Adam's love for her clearly exhibits her interpersonal exploitativeness and her lack of empathy: "she felt nothing when his eyes rested on her, but the cold triumph of knowing that he loved her, and would not care to look at Mary Burge. . . ." (100; ch. 9).

George Eliot's most devastating indictment of Hetty occurs when she compares her to the creatures she calls "water-nixies." Hetty is at the mirror again, trying on earrings Arthur has given her, "not thinking most of the giver when she smiled at the earrings . . . but . . . see[ing] how pretty they look. . ." (251; ch. 22). The passage continues:

It is impossible to be wise on the subject of earrings as one looks at her; what should those delicate pearls and crystals be made for, if not for such ears? One cannot even find fault with the tiny round holes which they leave when they are taken out; perhaps water-nixies, and such lovely things without souls, have these little round holes in their ears by nature, ready to hang jewels in. And Hetty must be one of them; it is too painful to think that she is a woman, with a woman's

destiny before her—a woman spinning in young ignorance a light web of folly and vain hopes which may one day close round her and press upon her, a rancorous poisoned garment, changing all at once her fluttering, trivial butterfly sensations into a life of deep human anguish. (251; ch. 22)

Of course, the purport of Eliot's rhetorical device, in which she states that Hetty must be a water-nixie because it is too painful to think of her as a human being, is that she is indeed human and is facing, as the result of her selfish foolishness, "a life of deep human anguish." Nevertheless, the association of Hetty with "lovely things without souls" has been made here.

The story of Hetty's mentoring becomes, in light of this connection, the story of an inhuman creature given a tincture of humanity—only that, because Dinah never fully succeeds with Hetty. As Dinah herself puts it at the end of the brief mentoring process, which takes place in the prison as Hetty awaits execution, Hetty's "poor soul is very dark, and discerns little beyond the things of the flesh. . ." (457; ch. 46). As the judge has sentenced Hetty to death, so Dinah sentences her to penal servitude in the realm of the natural. Dinah admits Hetty has approached the realm of the human sublime; the passage quoted from just above continues with, "she has confessed all to me. The pride of her heart has given way, and she leans on me for help, and desires to be taught" (457; ch. 46). Despite the fact that the outcome is so disappointing, the second half of the quote appears to describe a model George Eliot mentee. Hetty has made her confession to her mentor and clings to her contritely. But she is motivated primarily by fear of her coming death; she has little, if any, self-awareness of her narcissism. Perhaps Dinah is

simply working with poor quality material; perhaps there are some people who simply do not have the soul necessary to be fully human. The narrator implies as much when introducing Hetty to the reader: “we must learn to accommodate ourselves to the discovery that some of those cunningly-fashioned instruments called human souls have only a very limited range of music, and will not vibrate in the least under a touch that fills others with tremulous rapture or quivering agony” (97; ch. 9).

There is also an indication that Dinah is inexperienced as a mentor. In the adjoining bedrooms scene, she mistakes for a spiritual awakening Hetty’s reaction of fear to Dinah’s mention of future sorrow. Hetty then becomes angry and sends the ghostlike Dinah away. The narrator significantly prefaces this episode with the following comments:

It is our habit to say that while the lower nature can never understand the higher, the higher nature commands a complete view of the lower. But I think the higher nature has to learn this comprehension, as we learn the art of vision, by a good deal of hard experience, often with bruises and gashes incurred in taking things up by the wrong end, and fancying our space wider than it is. (159; ch. 15)

The polarity between the terms “higher” and “lower” as applied to human nature, like the polarity between the human sublime and the natural, reveals the hierarchy of moral values that Eliot’s mentoring narratives are based upon.

Fred Vincy represents Ludwig Feuerbach’s religious man, especially his Christian man. In Feuerbach’s view, beliefs in providence, a personal deity, miracles, and the

immortality of the soul exhibit the essential egotism of religion. Van Harvey explains that, for Feuerbach, all these beliefs

are manifestations of the natural narcissism of subjectivity and its desire to be freed from the constraints of natural necessity, a desire which Feuerbach believes reaches its apex in Christianity, with its emphasis on the individual person, an emphasis which ultimately isolates the human from nature and makes him/her an absolute being. The belief in providence is the most fundamental religious conviction because here it is most clearly revealed what religion is about: to assure the individual subject that his/her welfare is the highest good. (60)³

Fred illustrates this type of egotism in his unshakable optimism; he can't quite grasp the thought that the universe might not organize everything with his desires in mind. In the passage below, the narrator humorously discusses Fred's unlimited supply of "ready hopefulness" in reference to a debt he has incurred (119; ch. 12):

Fred had felt confident that he should meet the bill himself, having ample funds at disposal in his own hopefulness. You will hardly demand that his confidence should have a basis in external facts; such confidence, we know, is something less coarse and materialistic; it is a comfortable disposition leading us to expect that the wisdom of providence or the folly of our friends, the mysteries of luck or the still greater mystery of our high individual value in the universe, will bring about agreeable issues, such as are consistent with our good taste in costume, and our general preference for the best style of thing. (229; ch. 23)

In this respect Eliot agrees with Feuerbach: both believe that humanity must grow beyond the primordial narcissism that has given rise to a theistic religion. For Feuerbach, atheism was the answer; for George Eliot a religion of humanity which put sympathetic concern for others over the narrow trap of egotism.

The quote from *Middlemarch* above is also an example of how Eliot uses comedy to soften the intensity of the mentoring relationship in the rare examples of Mary-Fred and Dolly-Silas. The latter pair I will discuss at greater length in the final section of this chapter. In both these relationships, the narrator's humorous tone is strikingly different from the tone of severity with which the basic mentor-mentee relationships are treated. Whereas Fred is the butt of Eliot's humor as can be seen from the passage quoted, Mary—significantly—is shown to possess a sense of humor. A good way to describe her as a mentor, in fact, is that she is Daniel Deronda with a sense of humor. She is equally as given to deliver herself of moral platitudes as that upright gentleman, but the humor which prevents her from becoming self-righteous keeps her humanity from being lost. The dialogue between Mary and Fred below demonstrates this combination of traits in Mary, who speaks first:

“My father says an idle man ought not to exist, much less be married.”

“Then I am to blow my brains out?”

“No; on the whole I should think you would do better to pass your examination. I have heard Mr Farebrother say it is disgracefully easy.”

“That is all very fine. Anything is easy to him. Not that cleverness has anything to do with it. I am ten times cleverer than many men who pass.”

“Dear me!” said Mary, unable to repress her sarcasm. “That accounts for the curates like Mr Crowse. Divide your cleverness by ten, and the quotient—dear me!—is able to take a degree. But that only shows you are ten times more idle than the others.” (139; ch. 14)

Mary is highly serious in her critique of Fred’s irresponsible idleness and extravagance; yet, because she does not take herself so seriously, she does not elevate herself with the air of moral superiority that many of the other mentors—notably Daniel Deronda—do.

Eliot’s characterization of these mentors as superlative moral authorities is presented without irony: they are indeed, from Eliot’s and her narrators’ points of view, moral paragons. Mary, however, is a morally flawed mentor, and Eliot is direct in presenting this difference as the following extended passage shows:

Mary Garth . . . had the aspect of an ordinary sinner: she was brown; her curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low; and it would not be true to declare, in satisfactory antithesis, that she had all the virtues. Plainness has its peculiar temptations and vices quite as much as beauty; it is apt either to feign amiability, or, not feigning it, to show all the repulsiveness of discontent: at any rate, to be called an ugly thing in contrast with that lovely creature your companion, is apt to produce some effect beyond a sense of fine veracity and fitness in the phrase. At the age of two-and-twenty Mary had certainly not attained that perfect good sense and good principle which are usually recommended to the less fortunate girl, as if they were to be obtained in quantities ready mixed, with a flavour of resignation as required. Her shrewdness had a

streak of satiric bitterness continually renewed and never carried utterly out of sight, except by a strong current of gratitude towards those who, instead of telling her that she ought to be contented, did something to make her so. . . .[H]onesty, truth-telling fairness, was Mary's reigning virtue: she neither tried to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behoof, and when she was in a good mood she had humour enough in her to laugh at herself. (112-13; ch. 12)

Like the other mentors, Mary is morally superior to her mentee and makes an uncompromising moral judgment against him. But her own human imperfections keep her close to Fred in a manner that does not occur in most of the other mentor-mentee pairs.

In fact, Mary's vulnerability allows George Eliot a more flexible dramatic situation than can be constructed out of the standard mentoring situation, in which the mentor maintains a rather godlike distance from the rather wormlike mentee. Since both Mary and Fred are kept warmly human by the comedy which binds them close together, Mary is in a position to be hurt by Fred. The way in which Fred injures both Mary and her family by failing to pay a debt that Mary's father has cosigned for Fred, thus robbing the Garths of scarce funds they have been saving for other purposes, constitutes the dramatic tension of this subplot of *Middlemarch*. George Eliot, therefore, has provided herself with the raw material for dramatic possibilities more fertile than the typical mentor-mentee situation can afford her. In the typical situation the changeless mentor gazes out of his splendid perfection at the wretch of a mentee whom he is mercifully changing into

his own image. The Mary-Fred situation holds more interest for the reader because both characters are affected in the dramatic interchange.

However, with some important exceptions, such as the one discussed above—Mary’s humanness as a mentor—the Mary-Fred narrative in many ways resembles the standard mentoring pattern. As shown above, Fred’s egotism as mentee is evident in the comic form of an unrealistic optimism that expects the world to revolve around him. Not so comic is the insensitivity to how his actions might affect others which his egotism manifests. He is arrested in his wayward path by his mentor, experiences an epoch, and finally accepts his mentor. He is dependent upon her and finally abandons his egotism. Fred is willing to undergo the mentor-mentee process because he loves Mary. His love is selfish in many ways, but it binds him to someone who is unselfish and who has the power to guide him. And Mary has help in her mentoring work. Of the other important exceptions present in this relationship, the primary one is the fact that Fred is given not one mentor but three: Mr. Farebrother and Mr. Garth aid Mary in the severe task of transforming Fred into a productive member of society. It is Mr. Farebrother who arrests Fred in his egotistical tracks and who spurs Fred to the shattering realization that he must change or lose his chance to win Mary as his wife. Mr. Farebrother adroitly applies a little self-sacrificial emotional blackmail in warning Fred that he has been tempted by his own love for Mary to let the young man drift back into his reckless ways and out of Mary’s favor. He resists the temptation, instead giving Fred a friendly admonition. Fred is “moved quite newly” as a result of Mr. Farebrother’s revelation, and the narrator subsequently comments, “Some one highly susceptible to the contemplation of a fine act

has said, that it produces a sort of regenerating shudder through the frame, and makes one feel ready to begin a new life. A good degree of that effect was just then present in Fred Vincy” (676; ch. 66). This is Fred’s epoch and the moment in which he accepts his mentor Mr. Farebrother, towards whom he has been feeling jealous and resentful. The mentoring pattern then is picked up again by his relationship with Mary, upon whom Fred has been dependent all his life albeit not in the extreme sense that Janet and especially Gwendolen are upon their mentors. Fred’s salvation at the end of his story, now that he has become “unswervingly steady” (833; Finale) with the help of his mentors, is embodied in his having become the owner of Stone Court, a prosperous farmer, Mary’s husband, the father of three boys, and the author of *Cultivation of Green Crops and the Economy of Cattle-Feeding*. In a comic presentation of a successful mentoring relationship like Mary-Fred, both mentor and mentee can be allowed a closeness to nature (farming, cultivating green crops, and cattle-feeding) that more serious mentors and mentees must rise above.

Nature itself is the guiding spirit of the Dolly-Silas relationship, which is also a comic version of the mentoring narrative. Dolly, the ostensible mentor, is only a simple countrywoman; therefore, she does not have the other mentors’ highly cultivated ability to reflect philosophically on moral issues. In this gentle parody of her more serious mentoring narratives, Eliot shows the mentor instructing her mentee in such homely tasks as dressing and disciplining a toddler. Dolly’s most high-flown attempts at mentoring are directed toward encouraging Silas to go to church, as shown in her speech in the following passage:

“But now, upo’ Christmas-day, this blessed Christmas as is ever coming, if you was to . . . go to church, and see the holly and the yew, and hear the anthim, and then take the sacramen’, you’d be a deal the better, and you’d know which end you stood on, and you could put your trust i’ Them as knows better nor we do, seein’ you’d ha’ done what it lies on us all to do.” (137; ch. 10)

An uneducated woman living in a rural community, Dolly is guided by a folk wisdom which gives a superstitious cast to her Christian faith. Dolly represents human civilization in a relatively undeveloped state. She is thus closer to nature than the other mentors are. Fittingly in this return-to-nature tale, Silas has a greater degree of sophistication than his mentor does: he has grown up in a semiurban setting and has some education. (He can read while Dolly cannot). Dolly’s challenge as a mentor is to draw Silas out of his isolation from the community of Raveloe, in which he has cocooned himself since an early betrayal, which occurred in the large town of Lantern Yard. In this way, in *Silas Marner*, Eliot reaches toward a goal which is the reverse of what she focuses on in most other mentoring narratives: the successful outcome of the mentoring process in this novel entails remaining close to nature for both mentor and mentee. Nature is personified by golden-haired Eppie, the young child who comes to Silas in recompense for the gold that has been stolen from him.

Dolly’s closeness to nature, indicated by her membership in the rural community, is also demonstrated in her lack of the basic acquirement of civilization: education. In the touching scene quoted from above, in which she befriends Silas after the burglary which has deprived him of his miser’s hoard, Dolly brings him some cakes that she has marked

with a stamp that has been passed down through her husband's family. The stamp bears the letters *I.H.S.*⁴ Silas can read the letters, which is more than Dolly can do, but he is as blank as to their significance as she is. Dolly knows, however, that they must mean something good because she has seen them on the pulpit-cloth at church. The appearance of these puzzling marks on the pulpit-cloth indicates that she probably does not understand much of what is said in the pulpit, either. Her simple faith, by which she trusts despite her inability to understand, she expresses as she continues trying to persuade Silas to come to church:

“I feel so set up and comfortable as niver was, when I’ve been and heard the prayers, and the singing to the praise and glory o’ God, as Mr Macey gives out—and Mr Crackenthorp saying good words, and more partic’lar on Sacrament Day; and if a bit o’ trouble comes, I feel as I can put up wi’ it, for I’ve looked for help i’ the right quarter, and gev myself up to Them as we must all give ourselves up to at the last; and if we’n done our part, it isn’t to be believed as Them as are above us ’ull be worse nor we are, and come short o’ Their’n.” (137-38; ch. 10)

Eliot’s narrator follows this quote with a comment explaining that “the plural pronoun . . . was no heresy of Dolly’s, but only her way of avoiding a presumptuous familiarity” (138; ch. 10). Nevertheless, the plural pronoun might plausibly reflect a pagan syncretism which was undoubtedly a part of rural British Christianity even as late as the early years of the nineteenth century. This interpretation gives even stronger support to the idea that Dolly’s Christian faith is based in fundamental ignorance of Christian doctrine and tinged with a superstition derived from the focus on nature typical of pagan religions.

Dolly, therefore, represents a Rousseauian stage of civilization in which human beings have not so successfully separated themselves from nature as they had in the London of the early 1860s when Eliot wrote and published the novel. Accordingly, Dolly tries to draw her mentee toward nature rather than away from it, as the more sophisticated mentors are wont to do. However, she cannot be successful without the assistance of nature itself, personified by Eppie. Dolly makes her first ineffectual attempts to break through Silas' cold isolation prior to Eppie's arrival:

Silas said "Good-bye and thank you kindly," as he opened the door for Dolly, but he couldn't help feeling relieved when she was gone—relieved that he might weave again and moan at his ease. Her simple view of life and its comforts, by which she had tried to cheer him, was only like a report of unknown objects, which his imagination could not fashion. The fountains of human love and of faith in a divine love had not yet been unlocked, and his soul was still the shrunken rivulet, with only this difference, that its little groove of sand was blocked up, and it wandered confusedly against dark obstruction. (140; ch. 10)

It takes the beneficent power of nature, embodied in Eppie, to "unlock" "the fountains of human love and of faith in a divine love" for Silas. A young child, appearing on his doorstep in need of his care, is the agent of change in his life. Silas had, in his early adulthood, been a member of a nonconformist sect in Lantern Yard. He left that community after having been falsely accused of theft by his best friend, who then married Silas' fiancée. Devastated by this betrayal, Silas has moved to Raveloe where his life has been reduced to an insect-like existence in which he simply sits at his loom and weaves,

sells his cloth, and hoards the earnings left to him after tending to his meager daily wants. The ever-growing piles of coins become the only company he cares to keep, getting them out at night and telling them like rosary beads. Human fellowship has become for Silas something remote and unconnected from him. Eppie changes all that:

[T]he child created fresh and fresh links between his life and the lives from which he had hitherto shrunk continually into narrower isolation. Unlike the gold which needed nothing, and must be worshipped in close-locked solitude—which was hidden away from the daylight, was deaf to the song of birds, and started to no human tones—Eppie was a creature of endless claims and ever-growing desires, seeking and loving sunshine, and living sounds, and living movements; making trial of everything, with trust in new joy, and stirring the human kindness in all eyes that looked on her. . . . The gold had asked that he should sit weaving longer and longer, deafened and blinded more and more to all things except the monotony of his loom and the repetition of his web; but Eppie called him away from his weaving, and made him think all its pauses a holiday, re-awakening his senses with her fresh life. . . . (184; ch. 14)

Eppie literally draws Silas back into nature again: they spend many hours out in the fields among the flowers and birds. In both a Feuerbachian and a Wordsworthian manner, Eliot makes, in Eppie, an explicit link in this passage between nature and human fellowship. Eppie's attraction to nature and the village folk's attraction to and interest in Eppie jointly enfold Silas in a world of life and love that he has been deprived of for many years.

Significantly, Silas finds an interest in wild herbs gathered for healing purposes,

given him by his mother and later suppressed by his early Christian belief, reawakening in him. His early Christian community in Lantern Yard had been “a narrow religious sect” (56; ch. 1), and the group’s beliefs included such doctrines as “Assurance of salvation” (57; ch. 1), “visitation[s] of Satan” (58; ch. 1), and divination by drawing lots (61; ch. 1). In this context Silas

had had doubts about the lawfulness of applying th[e] knowledge [of medicinal herbs], believing that herbs could have no efficacy without prayer, and that prayer might suffice without herbs; so that his inherited delight to wander through the fields in search of foxglove and dandelion and coltsfoot, began to wear to him the character of a temptation. (57; ch. 1)

Eliot thus shows Christianity as the specific agent separating Silas from nature in the early part of his life. This causality reflects Feuerbach’s contention that a major current in Christian thought is the division of human beings and nature.

In Silas’ story, however, the happy ending is the reunion of this hapless and wasted man with nature. Like the young, fresh growth of the spring, Eppie brings renewal into Silas’ life in a way Wordsworth recognizes in his “Intimations” ode:

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!

.....

Hence in a season of calm weather

Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

.....

What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;

We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,

In years that bring the philosophic mind. (9.1-4, 33-39; 10.8-19)

Wordsworth's ode has a heavy, mournful feel even in the lines in which he expresses his continuing joy in nature; despite his protestation to the contrary, he grieves for the oneness with nature he experienced as a young child. In *Silas Marner* the feeling is more

of the joy of renewed life despite the pain of the past. Silas seems not to be troubled with the sense Wordsworth's speaker has that his new, adult joy in nature can never be anything but a faded imitation of what he experienced as a boy. Eliot expresses the glory of ever-renewed and -renewing nature in the following Wordsworthian passage:

[Eppie] was perfectly quiet now, but not asleep—only soothed . . . into that wide-gazing calm which makes us older human beings, with our inward turmoil, feel a certain awe in the presence of a little child, such as we feel before some quiet majesty or beauty in the earth or sky—before a steady glowing planet, or a full-flowered eglantine, or the bending trees over a silent pathway. (175; ch. 13)

Silas has, with the help of nature, returned to life: with the help of his mentor Dolly and nature itself, personified by Eppie, he is now grounded in the natural beauty of the earth and restored to active fellowship with the human community. He now lives a fuller life, which is gradually rendering his days of miserly isolation a dim memory.

This is a radically different outcome from that attending most of George Eliot's mentoring narratives. The chief difference is that, in this novel, Eliot does not set herself the task of reforming an egotist. Silas the miser is completely wrapped up in himself, but this condition is the scar left from the wound he received from people he trusted. What he needs more than anything else is healing and renewal. Eliot, therefore, provides him with a sympathetic mentor in Dolly and the healing touch of nature in Eppie. He, as well as Dolly and Eppie, is an innocent. As a result, Silas is not required, as most mentees are, to make severe changes in his personality based on the moral assessment of the mentor. In most of the other mentoring stories, the mentor asks the mentee to go against nature, to

be false to herself, to make herself something she isn't. Silas, on the contrary, is welcomed back to life and love as he is; without internal transformation, he achieves spiritual harmony with nature and the human community.

In this mentoring narrative, therefore, Eliot remains closer to her own mentors Wordsworth and Feuerbach than she does in most others. Because Silas' personality is not tainted with the arrogant egotism that mars Hetty's or Esther's or Gwendolen's, she is content to allow him a simple closeness with nature and humanity that does not suffice for mentees who merit moral judgment. When Eliot sees the need to bring in the big guns of morality, however, nature becomes a forgotten quantity, and the Christian worldview supercedes all.

NOTES

¹ The Victorians complicated this attribution of characteristics to the female by idealizing the weakness and ignorance in an attempt to mask the degradation. Degradation was openly associated only with prostitutes. On the other hand, in respectable women, weakness was considered an especially feminine trait. Similarly, pains were taken to keep women ignorant of the many things it was not considered proper that they know, such as the sordid details of the world of commerce and, especially before marriage, an intimate knowledge of the human body and sexuality. For more on this subject, with an incisive application of it to the field of Victorian art, see Lynda Nead's *Myths of Sexuality*.

² These examples of female equality in Eliot's fiction would seem to indicate a feminist tendency. However, it is important to remember that these female mentors are exceptions in a host of wise male mentors. Considering that Victorian commonplace wisdom assigned women the role of being moral beacons in the home, Eliot was actually taking a stand which was more reactionary than contemporary culture in depicting so many female characters in dire need of male moral instruction. The mature Marian Evans was conservative and always tended to hesitate when it came to feminist issues.

³ See Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 107.

⁴ *I.H.S.* is either a partial transliteration of the first three letters of the Greek *Iēsoûs*, or Jesus; or the initials of the Middle Latin phrase *Iēsus Hominum Salvātor*, or Jesus, Savior of Men.

CHAPTER 6

MAGGIE TULLIVER: DROWNING IN THE ARMS OF REGRESSION

Barbara Hardy was perhaps the first to comment, in her discussion of “the hero as mentor” (57), that, of all George Eliot’s characters, “the most successful mentor and rescuer is Philip [Wakem]” (54) of *The Mill on the Floss*. However, his victory in rescuing his mentee Maggie Tulliver is at most a Pyrrhic one. Philip counsels Maggie to be true to herself in a society that will not permit a woman that luxury. At the end of the novel, the relentless flood, representing Maggie’s repressed but finally unsubduable nature, overwhelms her and takes her to her death. In her discussion of this novel, Hardy does not work with the mentoring theme beyond her application of it to Philip. Philip, however, is one of five mentors and antimentors George Eliot assigns to Maggie in the course of the novel. The other mentors are Dr. Kenn and Thomas à Kempis; the antimentors are Maggie’s brother Tom and Stephen Guest. Dr. Kenn, who appears only in the last book of the novel, is the pro forma mentor. He is the mentor who most closely fits the basic pattern Eliot follows in her other fiction. Nevertheless, Dr. Kenn fails as a mentor in the end when he abandons Maggie to her fate. Thomas à Kempis is Maggie’s spiritual mentor, who counsels her across the centuries, through his book *The Imitation of Christ*, to embrace a life of self-renunciation. The antimentors try to oppress Maggie with or tempt her toward values and conduct she considers wrong. Tom, who is harsh and unsympathetic in his treatment of his adoring younger sister, tries to make her conform to the rigid conventionalities of provincial society. He allows her no room to

grow into her authentic self. Stephen, on the other hand, tempts Maggie to follow her natural desires without inhibition at the expense of her ties to the community. In the novel's ironic ending, Maggie successfully resists the antimentors and remains true to the mentors who remain true to her (Philip and Thomas à Kempis), only to be swept away in the flood that is her woman's passion, which she has unsuccessfully tried to repress in a regressive desire to remain a child. Her ironic success includes two shifts: the first is that Philip finally confesses that Maggie has been a truer mentor to him than he has been to her. The second comprises the fact that, in the novel's catastrophic ending, Maggie is able to reclaim Tom—now no longer an antimentor but simply her beloved brother again—as they drown together, returning to their childhood in a last watery embrace.

Eliot measures each of Maggie's mentors and antimentors by the way he teaches her to view the past. In this novel, which, according to Donald D. Stone, is Eliot's "most Wordsworthian novel" (194), the past is presented as the cherished core of each individual's love for the world he or she is a part of. This is the key, in fact, to the ultimate failure of all the mentors and antimentors. None of them encourages Maggie to nurture and revere the ties with people, places, and objects that she instinctively has formed from her childhood years up into her adulthood. Maggie, directed not by a mentor but by her own counsel, maintains this crucial love throughout her life. Her final reunion with Tom in death constitutes its triumph and adds another layer to the irony of her end.

Dr. Kenn is the parish priest whom Maggie meets while visiting her cousin Lucy at the end of the novel. She is experiencing the agonizing struggle between sexual

temptation in her relationship with Stephen and loyalty to Lucy—who is unofficially engaged to Stephen—and to Philip, to whom Maggie herself is unofficially engaged. Dr. Kenn has no idea yet of these complex relations, but, in his first conversation with Maggie, he can sense the emotional tumult she is undergoing. For her part, Maggie senses that Dr. Kenn could be a wise mentor:

She felt a childlike, instinctive relief . . . when she saw it was Dr. Kenn's face that was looking at her: that plain, middle-aged face, with a grave, penetrating kindness in it, seeming to tell of a human being who had reached a firm, safe strand, but was looking with helpful pity towards the strugglers still tossed by the waves, had an effect on Maggie at this moment which was afterwards remembered by her as if it had been a promise. (382; ch. 48)

Later, after Maggie has suffered the disgrace attendant on eloping with Stephen but returning to St. Ogg's unmarried, she turns to Dr. Kenn for support and help. Dr. Kenn bears more of the marks of Eliot's typical mentor than any of the others in *The Mill on the Floss*: a wise man with a mature moral sensibility, he undertakes to guide a young woman who is in need of moral counsel. Maggie makes her confession to Dr. Kenn, a common feature of Eliot's mentoring narratives. Eliot's likening the mentor's function to that of a priest is still another of the recurring characteristics. Dr. Kenn is an Anglican priest, but Eliot makes clear in the following passage that the priesthood of the mentor is of a different order:

The middle-aged, who have lived through their strongest emotions, but are yet in the time when memory is still half passionate and not merely contemplative,

should surely be a sort of natural priesthood, whom life has disciplined and consecrated to be the refuge and rescue of stumblers and victims of self-despair. Most of us, at some moment in our young lives, would welcome a priest of that natural order in any sort of canonicals or uncanonicals, but had to scramble upwards into all the difficulties of nineteen entirely without such aid, as Maggie did. (382; ch. 48)

Like Felix Holt and Mr. Tryan, Dr. Kenn's mentorship seems to have a sacerdotal quality, which would certainly seem to authenticate him as a George Eliot mentor.

Nevertheless, as Eliot hints at the end of both quotations above, Dr. Kenn finally fails Maggie just as the other mentors do, breaking the promise she has perceived in his presence and leaving her to "scramble" alone. His first response is to brave community disapproval, believing Maggie to have been treated unjustly. When his efforts to secure Maggie work are stymied by the uncharitable prejudice of his parishioners, he offers her a position as governess in his own widower's household. This initial courage quickly withers, however, when he allows himself to be convinced by "an earnest remonstrance from one of his male parishioners" that, as a clergyman, he must avoid "the appearance of evil" (451; ch. 58). Eliot's narrative backdrop to the relating of this development consists of the heavy rains that will shortly cause the flood that will take Maggie to her death. Dr. Kenn's desertion of Maggie, thus associated with and accentuated by her doom, is perhaps the most egregious offense a mentor can commit.

Though Dr. Kenn originally displays all the earmarks of an outstanding mentor, Eliot gives us a clue to his eventual unworthiness for the role in the fact that he has no ties to

Maggie's past. He comes to the parish of St. Ogg's while Maggie is teaching at a school some distance away. He has not known her through her childhood and girlhood as she grows to young adulthood. The bonds of love and loyalty formed in a pastoral relationship over many years would perhaps have enabled him to withstand the malicious gossip to which he eventually succumbs. Maggie leaves Dr. Kenn, when he has informed her that he must dispense with her services, with "a new sense of desolation. She must be a lonely wanderer" (451; ch. 58). To Eliot's mind, being a lone individual, unconnected to a sustaining community, is truly hell on earth.

The supreme irony of Maggie's brother Tom's being one of her antimentors is that he represents one tie to the past that she deeply cares for. Most of her cherished childhood memories center on Tom, the older brother she has always revered. Tom, however, is unloving and severe even in childhood. As he grows into adulthood, he develops a rigid adherence to social convention and proud respectability. Maggie, with her impulsive, passionate nature, is always colliding with his implacable expectations. Her greatest sin, in his eyes—before she absolutely disgraces the family by running away with Stephen—is her incorrigible tendency to befriend Philip. Because Philip is the son of the man who has ruined Mr. Tulliver, Tom makes it a matter of family pride to consider him a sworn enemy. When he discovers that Maggie and Philip have been pursuing a clandestine friendship, he explodes in anger, without trying to understand Maggie's actions, motives, or needs.

Tom's lack of sympathy towards Maggie and his insistence on her observance of stultifying social standards constitute his relation to her as an antimentor. True concern

for her benefit or her growth as an individual is lacking in him from the start. He simply wants to see her behave respectably so that she will not taint the family name. Thus, instead of acting as a mentor who will lovingly guide, support, and facilitate her growth, Tom presents to Maggie a rocklike impediment that she stumbles on again and again. Though Tom, more than any of the other mentors and antimentors, could be the precious link to the past which Maggie longs for, he values the past only in the form of ossified social practice handed down unthinkingly from generation to generation.

Thomas à Kempis and Stephen represent opposite ends of a dichotomy of values in their mentoring of Maggie. À Kempis teaches her to strive for a life of severe self-abnegation while Stephen tempts her to indulge fully her natural desires—especially her sexual desire. Maggie turns to à Kempis during the difficult period in her family's life when her father loses a lawsuit and is ruined financially, his mill bought by his enemy, Philip's father John Wakem. Mr. Tulliver, now obliged to work for Wakem to avoid having to leave the family mill, is broken and bitter. The family catastrophe so overwhelms Maggie that she welcomes à Kempis' teaching of self-sacrificial living in the hope that she may lessen her pain by forswearing any joy. By chance she comes across an old copy of *The Imitation of Christ*. Aided by an unknown reader of the past who has marked passages with a "quiet hand" (253; ch. 32), Maggie receives à Kempis' quietistic message as an illumination of her spiritual turmoil. À Kempis teaches her to "[f]orsake thyself, resign thyself" (253; ch. 32), declaring that self-love is a sinful, "inordinate inclination" (253; ch. 32). À Kempis' use of *inordinate* implies that self-love is an act by which a human being overreaches his or her sanctioned place in the created order, the

Great Chain of Being. The love of self is an indication that one is presuming to appropriate God's place at the apex of the Great Chain, for only God is worthy of love. Only by renouncing such inordinate love, by forsaking oneself, by abandoning oneself, by losing oneself in God, says this traditional Christian teacher, can one hope to gain "much inward peace" (253; ch. 32).

The odd paradox involved in this reasoning is contained in the implication that one can experience peace without a self or a psychic center which can register the experience. À Kempis and other Christian writers who have made use of such language are undoubtedly doing so metaphorically. To paraphrase what they are advocating in psychoanalytic terms is to characterize this mental state as a deadening of id and ego functions in the service of an overinflated superego; another way to view it would be as a kind of voluntary or self-induced depression. Maggie attempts to enter this state from a desire to escape the unhappiness she is already experiencing in her life. She receives the revelations she discovers in à Kempis' book "as if she had been wakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor" (253; ch. 32). She is excited by the thought of a plane of existence inhabited by these supernal beings, whose lives transcend the dreary life she leads. The Great Chain of Being may have fixed our place in the cosmic scheme for the duration of our time in the temporal sphere, but the Christian hope is that, through a life in which our sinful humanity is purged by self-renouncing obedience and service, we may finally be allowed to join God in the life everlasting. The present life is merely a "stupor" compared to the vitality that may be experienced in the kingdom of heaven. If we can only deny

ourselves to the utmost in this life, this reasoning goes, the heavenly rewards will be great. There is undoubtedly a conviction operating here that if we can keep ourselves pure and intact, unviolated by the world, we will be able to present a more valuable offering when we arrive in the heavenly kingdom. The inescapable analogy is to the retention of virginity for the rightful lord and master. Worldly ties or beloved memories of the past are not desirable for the soul that would be holy. Thomas à Kempis does not allow for that cherishing of the past which forms Maggie's true religion. He would undoubtedly counsel Maggie that holding onto the past is simply another form of self-indulgence which must be rooted from the soul.

À Kempis' logic, which is solidly within the Christian tradition, is undeniably skewed. It envisions the devout Christian disposing of self in order for that same jettisoned self to receive delayed gratification in the form of great rewards later on. What psychic agency can possibly be carrying out the task of ridding the self of the self? How can a self which has annihilated itself receive a reward later on for having accomplished the annihilation successfully? The main recourse of Neoplatonic Western Christianity, in its attempt to untwist this logic, has been the body/soul split. Because it has envisioned the soul as an entity separable from the body, it has been able to accomplish much by requiring painful sacrifice of the body while promising the soul a heavenly reward after death when the soul will be free of the burden of physical existence.

Maggie, however, is not prepared to make the required sacrifice by giving up her present ego consolations:

[I]n the ardour of first discovery, renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain. She had not perceived—how could she until she had lived longer?—the inmost truth of the old monk’s outpourings, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly. Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it. (254; ch. 32)

Eliot also makes apparent that Maggie’s efforts to suppress her emotional life in the cause of self-renunciation are ineffectual, by embedding a throwaway phrase in a sentence whose main purport is to testify to the positive quality of Maggie’s new inner discipline: “That new inward life of hers, *notwithstanding some volcanic upheavings of imprisoned passions*, yet shone out in her face with a tender soft light that mingled itself as added loveliness with the gradually enriched colour and outline of her blossoming youth” (256-57, ch. 32; italics added).

When Stephen Guest enters Maggie’s life, the volcano erupts. Maggie has joined Lucy for a visit after having been away from St. Ogg’s, working as a schoolteacher. Stephen and Maggie find themselves overcome by a powerful sexual attraction, which Maggie resists at first but eventually succumbs to at Stephen’s urgings. He tricks her into running away with him. She repudiates the action almost immediately, returning to St. Ogg’s alone, but not before she is indelibly stained by scandal in the eyes of the townspeople.

Stephen’s role as an antimentor is revealed in his luring Maggie to act in opposition to her values. He is not a cardboard cutout villain: he too wrestles with his conscience in

his attraction towards Maggie. However, he succumbs first and fully to the temptation and thus becomes Maggie's tempter. He and Maggie are boating on the River Floss; without her knowledge, he allows the boat to drift far past the place they would ordinarily have turned back. Maggie is indignant when she realizes what Stephen has done. Stephen, in turn, tries to convince Maggie that the only way to rectify the situation is for them to placate outraged virtue by marrying before they return to St. Ogg's. She refuses categorically and returns to St. Ogg's alone.

In Maggie's mind, what Stephen is suggesting by his marriage proposal amounts to a continuing drift from responsibility emblemized by their drift on the river's current. She considers their responsibilities to past relationships—in particular with Lucy, Philip, and Tom—to be sacred and overriding in importance. She cannot bring herself, finally, to reject the past in favor of her passion for Stephen. In Stephen Gill's view, Maggie shows herself here to be, in fact, "in thrall to her past" (159), unable to accept the changes to her life and identity that sexual awakening brings with it. Gill points to Maggie's speech to Stephen that "If I could wake back again into the time before yesterday, I would choose to be true to my calmer affections, and live without the joy of love" (418; ch. 53). Thus in her triumph over this antimentor, which she achieves by embracing the pain that returning to her hometown's scorn will bring her, Maggie rebuffs natural desire. The "calmer affections" of childhood—no doubt the innocuous feelings of the sexless latency period—are what the adult Maggie longs for in a regressive refusal to grow. It is during the latency period that the psychic activity of sublimation begins to flourish. The point of sublimation is to transform natural desire—specifically sexual desire—into more

socially acceptable forms of expending energy, from art or philosophy to embroidery or woodworking. In its crusade against the natural, Christianity has made extensive use of this culturally induced psychic deformation.

Sublimation is the primary tool that Philip uses in mentoring Maggie. More precisely, he urges her to adopt sublimation in the form of learning and culture as opposed to the severe religious sublimation she has taken up in her early teen years under the influence of Thomas à Kempis. He recognizes and brings forcefully to Maggie's attention the stifling nature of the self-renunciation that à Kempis teaches:

“[Y]ou are shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dulness [*sic.*] all the highest powers of your nature. Joy and peace are not resignation: resignation is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed—that you don't expect to be allayed. Stupefaction is not resignation: and it is stupefaction to remain in ignorance—to shut up all the avenues by which the life of your fellow-men might become known to you. . . . *You* are not resigned: you are only trying to stupefy yourself.”
(288: ch. 35)

Under the influence of her new mentor, Maggie does begin to open herself to the world she has been denying and allow herself the inner growth she has been trying to block. Unfortunately Tom discovers their secret friendship and puts a brutal end to their meetings. Her next and final attempt at self-expression occurs at the end of the novel when she falls in love with Stephen, a move which ends in disaster.

Philip's mentoring of Maggie is motivated, in part, by self-interest. Though he is genuinely concerned for her well-being in counseling her to free herself from the shackles of self-abnegation, he has an ulterior motive in the fact that he is in love with her and wants to spend time with her. To this end, he urges her to “*let me supply you with books; do let me see you sometimes—be your brother and teacher. . .*” (289; ch. 35). He encourages Maggie to cherish the past in the form of art and literature, but he is less enthusiastic about teaching her to cherish her personal past, considering this includes a father and brother who hate him by association with his own father. Philip's mentorship over Maggie comes to an ironic conclusion at the end of the novel, when he comes to see the egotism embedded in his mentoring and confesses to Maggie that she has been the truer mentor of the two.

Philip writes Maggie a letter at the end of the novel when she has returned to St. Ogg's after her shameful flight with Stephen. He describes to Maggie the process of reflection that has brought him to the point of realizing and renouncing his egotism and entering a “purer” love for her:

“even in [my] utmost agony—even in those terrible throes that love must suffer before it can be disembodied of selfish desire—my love for you sufficed to withhold me from suicide, without the aid of any other motive. In the midst of my egoism, I yet could not bear to come like a death-shadow across the feast of your joy. . . . The new life I have found in caring for your joy and sorrow more than for what is directly my own, has transformed the spirit of rebellious murmuring into that willing endurance which is the birth of strong sympathy. I

think that nothing but such complete and intense love could have initiated me into that enlarged life which grows and grows by appropriating the life of others. . . .

“For some time I have shrunk from writing to you, because I have shrunk even from the appearance of wishing to thrust myself before you, and so repeating my original error. . . . [R]emember that I am unchangeably yours: yours—not with selfish wishes, but with a devotion that excludes such wishes.” (442-43; ch. 56)

Philip’s use of images in describing this process is curious: he speaks of his love as having to be “‘disembodied of selfish desire’,” and then, a little further in the passage, he exultantly proclaims that this love, now disembodied but a “‘complete and intense love’,” is the only thing that could gain entry for him into “‘that enlarged life which grows and grows by appropriating the life of others. . . .’” Philip and, through him, Eliot are undoubtedly using these images to describe a spiritual process—a spiritual process predicated on the traditional body/soul split of Christianity. This love, which congratulates itself on having achieved a special refinement by virtue of having left the clamors of the body behind, nevertheless seems to need to feed on “‘the life of others’” to sustain its growth. It is as if, for the disembodied soul, one psyche—one’s own psyche—is never enough. One is tempted to make an irreverent association with the science fiction film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Eliot’s bizarre logic prescribes, similarly, that one’s own body be discarded as a worthless husk in order that the real treasures, other people’s psyches or souls, may be “snatched.”

Philip thus testifies in his letter to Maggie’s superior mentorship of him even while he presumed to consider himself her mentor. Nevertheless, when Eliot introduces the letter

into the narrative, she presents Philip, in his struggle to rid himself of his egotism, as having redeemed himself. He now has become a genuine link to Maggie's past: "Bob brought her a letter, without a post-mark, directed in a hand which she knew familiarly in the letters of her own name—a hand in which her name had been written long ago, in a pocket Shakespeare which she possessed" (441; ch. 56). Philip has become worthy to pen Maggie's name: he has inscribed himself into her personal history. Therefore he has become a part of the community of past ties which she has always longed for but which her actual life and connections have not satisfactorily provided for her.

This comfort, however, coming to Maggie towards the conclusion of the narrative, is not sufficient to comprise a happy ending for her. Likewise, Maggie's ability to wrench herself back to the path of virtue against every wish of her passionate self seems to indicate that she is highly qualified to provide the "ghostly" counsel that a mentor must. Though Philip acknowledges Maggie's merit as a mentor, she never is given the opportunity to exercise that function in her relationship with Philip or anyone else. The reason that opportunity never comes to her is that her passionate self, in a kind of "return of the repressed" (Freud, "Neuro-Psychoses of Defence" 170), sweeps her to a tumultuous annihilation in the form of the flood, where, ironically, she lives out her childish wish to become one with her beloved Tom.

With this dramatic scene at the end of the novel in which the sister and brother drown in each other's arms, Eliot caps the irony inherent in Maggie and Tom's relationship. Thwarted by Tom in her attempts at loving union with him in life, Maggie triumphs for a few brief moments in their deathly joining. Moments before their death, Maggie

experiences “that mysterious wondrous happiness that is one with pain” when Tom, experiencing an epiphany of sorts of his own, calls her by “the old childish--‘Magsie!’” (458; ch. 58). Eliot sends the pair off with an elegiac memorialization of their shared childhood: “brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted: living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together” (459; ch. 58). Maggie has been granted her wish to return to her childhood, even though she must exchange a full adult life for a brief moment of regressive gratification.

Maggie is not a typical Eliot mentee. From her childhood up, her character is marked by deep passion. She is not beset with the egotism which is the primary characteristic of most mentees. Correlatively, Maggie has a moral sensibility which the typical mentee completely lacks before undergoing the mentoring process. Maggie needs no mentor to direct her in the right path when Tom is teaching her that respectability is more important than love and when Stephen is tempting her to desert precious relationships hallowed by the past. By dint of a sad struggle, she resists these two powerful antimentors while suffering the abandonment resulting from the failures of her three mentors. To differentiate between failed mentors and antimentors is, perhaps, merely a verbal quibble. As a mentee, Maggie must overcome them all. Indeed, as discussed above, Maggie is revealed at the end of the novel to be a truer mentor than any of the men posturing as mentors in her life. Philip is the only ersatz mentor who acknowledges this fact explicitly, but Maggie could have taught any of the others a thing or two. Without guidance, Maggie successfully resists her antimentors while not ceasing to love them.

She remains true to her mentors Philip and Thomas à Kempis despite their flaws. (Dr. Kenn drops out of the picture after he dismisses Maggie from her post as governess, thus, in effect, leaving her to her fate.) Maggie is deeply moved by Philip's letter, quoted from above; she feels confirmed in her act of breaking with Stephen for the sake of remaining loyal to Philip and Lucy: "As Maggie knelt by the bed sobbing, with that letter pressed under her, her feelings again and again gathered themselves in a whispered cry, always in the same words: 'O God, is there any happiness in love that could make me forget *their* pain?'" (443-44; ch. 56).

When the adolescent Maggie attempts to use Thomas à Kempis' teaching as a rigid and all-encompassing rule of life, Philip rightly identifies the stultifying pall such a self-denying doctrine casts over her. Nevertheless, Maggie returns to à Kempis for help in accomplishing a single important task as the novel draws to a close. She draws on her memory of his counsel when she wants to continue to resist rejoining Stephen. That temptation is painfully reawakened when Stephen writes her a letter begging her to let him come to her. At that moment, Thomas à Kempis' teaching seems to her to be

the light that . . . came with the memories that no passion could long quench: the long past came back to her, and with it the fountains of self-renouncing pity and affection, of faithfulness and resolve. The words that were marked by the quiet hand in the little old book that she had long ago learned by heart, rushed even to her lips, and found a vent for themselves in a low murmur that was quite lost in the loud driving of the rain against the window and the loud moan and roar of the

wind: “I have received the Cross, I have received it from Thy hand; I will bear it, and bear it till death, as Thou hast laid it upon me.” (453; ch. 58)

The image of à Kempis’ words of ultimate Christian self-sacrifice, uttered in “a low murmur that was quite lost in the loud driving of the rain against the window and the loud moan and roar of the wind,” powerfully presages the novel’s final catastrophe.

Significantly, the Christian murmur is “quite lost” in the tumult of the coming flood, which, after all, is the narrative’s terrible victor. The flood represents the return of the repressed, the return of all that Maggie has struggled imperfectly to deny in herself: her own passion to grow into full womanhood. In accepting the teachings of Thomas à Kempis, in accepting Philip as a love object despite the fact that she feels no passion for him, in rejecting Stephen despite her overwhelming passion for him, Maggie has maintained an opposition to her natural feelings, specifically her sexual inclinations, that has lasted her entire adolescence and young adulthood. Maggie is thirteen years old (241; ch. 31)—just at the turning point of puberty—when she begins to mount this opposition; family troubles are weighing her down, and she seeks to escape the pain of adult life by taking refuge in à Kempis’ direction in self-abnegation.

Victorian society certainly did not afford women the luxury of growing into their full selves. George Eliot demonstrated her awareness of this fact in almost every novel she wrote. In *The Mill on the Floss* her depiction of the Dodson philosophy of life makes painfully clear the narrow purview and ambition Maggie is expected to limit herself to if she is to become a respectable woman of the family. However, even Dodson dictates would allow Maggie, grown into womanhood, to enjoy a marriage based on love, subject

to the restriction that the young man come from a respectable family of generous means, thus enabling Maggie to keep up the high Dodson standards of material ownership. But Maggie is no Jane Eyre, who follows Rochester's mystical call over many miles in order to find her fulfillment in marriage. Neither is she a Romola, who leaves her husband because she feels she cannot be true to herself as a woman if she stays with him. In short, Maggie does not want to be a woman. She wants to remain a child, in that time of happy latency, and to avoid all the complications that awakened sexuality and adult life inevitably bring. This desire is at the root of her cherishing of the past. What Stephen asks her to do is to grow into adulthood, accepting the frightening burden of responsibility for herself, a self which now includes a sexual identity. He is asking her to accept her own desire—this is the secret of his power and his danger to Maggie as an antimentor. Maggie makes a conscious choice, painfully and with much difficulty, to reject her own passion in favor of her wish to remain a child. It would seem that this wish reflects the stronger inclination in Maggie if it were not for the devastating end to her story. The flood, representing Maggie's libido, her urge to full development as a human being, overwhelms her conscious ego, which has withdrawn into cautious regression. Maggie is drowned in this returning deluge of repressed desire as she enacts the regressive wish to be joined with her brother forever in a childish embrace.

Regression is powered by fear—in Maggie's case, fear of the natural drive towards sexual fulfillment within the context of growth into adulthood.¹ Growth into adulthood is basic to the teleological map as well as to the DNA map of every living being. It is the physical component of the fullness of being that results from self-actualization. Maggie's

fear is an exaggerated reflection of the fear of sexuality and the natural that has been endemic to Western Christian culture. During the Victorian period, this fear of the body, sex, and the natural reached unparalleled heights and was manifested in the obsessive prudery with which the word *Victorian* is commonly considered today to be almost synonymous. From the decorum which demanded that bare legs of furniture be covered to the child-raising philosophy that deemed it a violation of modesty to provide girls with any information about sex until their wedding day (and even then precious little), Victorians are notorious for their fastidiousness in sexual morals. (Like Maggie's flood, however, prostitution inundated Victorian society at an extraordinarily high rate.) Denial of the natural was considered by Victorians to be a mark of a high level of cultural development. Such denial thus set educated middle-class Victorians conveniently apart from the working class, who, except for a few "deserving" individuals striving to elevate themselves into a higher class, were considered barbarous and brutal.

Middle-class Christians could then view themselves as higher on the Great Chain of Being than the working class population. Christianity's cosmological system, based on the Great Chain, awards value to what is above nature—the supernatural—and, accordingly, devalues nature itself. Thus the body and its natural drive towards growth, with its endpoint of adulthood, are considered shameful, repugnant, or even evil. It is no coincidence that the concept of sin is introduced in the Judaeo-Christian creation myth by a woman in cahoots with an especially feared and loathed animal. Material existence and evil are linked there in the same narrative. Though orthodox Christianity has long repudiated the exaggerated dualism that Gnosticism celebrated, these dualistic tendencies

still form a distinct undercurrent in orthodox Christian thought. This undercurrent was exploited more by Victorian “high culture” than perhaps at any other time in the history of Christendom. As presented in Chapter 2, “high” and “low,” “pure” and “impure,” “cultivated” and “coarse,” “spirit” and “body” are dichotomous pairs which express the charged moral sense with which Victorians perceived a profoundly divided reality.

George Eliot’s own (perhaps unconscious) longing for the Christianity of her past kept her allied with it in her denial of the natural. Her own copy of à Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ* remained on her bedside table all her life. Though she no longer believed the supernatural claims of Christian doctrine, she believed fervently in the righteousness of striving to deny oneself in the service of others. Her mentor characters are those who are charged with leading those who have stumbled back to what is right and good. A character who takes her eyes off the duty of serving others in order to follow a natural inclination is showing a tendency towards what is “low,” “impure,” “coarse”: in fine, the body. It is thus ironic that Eliot describes her mentors as belonging to “a natural priesthood” (382; ch. 48) as she does in the second block quote of this chapter (pages 129-30). What she means by “natural” here is “not sanctioned by the superstitions of a theistic religion.” She does not mean to align herself with nature or the body. As a covert Christian, she regards those entities as “low,” “brutal,” “barbarous,” something her “higher nature” bids her separate herself from by cultivating a kind of spiritual growth that will raise her from the earth into bodiless blessedness.

NOTES

¹ Maggie shares this fear with Gwendolen. Gwendolen, too, clings to the past in wanting to retain her childish sway over her family. Though Gwendolen suffers sexual abuse at the hands of her husband, she, like Maggie, never enjoys sexual fulfillment. Gwendolen protects herself from sex with the psychic armor of aversion. Further, her desire to remain a child is reflected in her excessive dependence on Daniel.

CHAPTER 7

MENTORING FAILURES: THE DARK VISION OF *MIDDLEMARCH*

In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot presents her readers with one successful mentor-mentee relationship—Mary-Fred—which is, nevertheless, topsy-turvy in its gender-role reversal¹ and, by the same token, a comic treatment of the theme. By contrast, the other two major mentoring relationships in the novel—Casaubon-Dorothea and Lydgate-Rosamond—are resounding failures. Their stories are filled with the ironies inherent in repeated failed attempts to connect. The fault lies with all four characters: each is to varying degrees self-absorbed. For a mentor to be egotistic and thoroughly out of tune with others is unthinkable. An Eliot mentor must not only be motivated by sympathy for others but must also have the capacity for moral leadership. The pathetic Mr. Casaubon's self-absorption is profound: he lacks all capacities except for that of resentment fueled by the anguish of self-doubt. A mentee does not have to be as upstanding as a mentor—certainly not initially. She is typically beset with egotism when she makes the acquaintance of her mentor. But she must have enough openness of mind gradually to perceive her own egotism and to accept her need for reform. She must be able to recognize her mentor as someone with moral authority over her and be willing to change under his direction. Contrary to this model, Rosamond is a law unto herself, never questioning herself for a moment. She recognizes no authority whatsoever over herself. By contrast, Dorothea wants a mentor so badly that she idealizes Mr. Casaubon, refusing at first to see his deficiencies. Like Rosamond, she hopes her new husband will provide

her a way out of the narrow provincial society of Middlemarch. The difference is that Dorothea is seeking a sense of moral purpose while the vain Rosamond longs to shine in fashionable society. Lydgate, whose scientific percipience is acute, is, nevertheless, “a little spotted with commonness” (149; ch. 15) when it comes to things like “furniture, or women, or the desirability of its being known (without his telling) that he was better born than other country surgeons” (150; ch. 15). He expects Rosamond, as his wife, to ornament his domestic life, devotedly and submissively following his direction. In this sense, he wants her to be a mentee. But it never occurs to Lydgate to wonder what her own thoughts and wishes might be; he is not truly concerned with her growth as a person.

Casaubon’s suspicion of the malice of others towards himself extends even to his young wife. His anxiety about the value of his scholarly work makes him read Dorothea’s eagerness to help him as the same carping criticism he has received from colleagues. (One is actually called Carp.) Casaubon cannot open himself to trust Dorothea’s love and respect because his self-doubt is an overpowering obstacle. Eliot masterfully sums up his personality in a memorable passage:

He had not had much foretaste of happiness in his previous life. To know intense joy without a strong bodily frame, one must have an enthusiastic soul. Mr Casaubon had never had a strong bodily frame, and his soul was sensitive without being enthusiastic: it was too languid to thrill out of self-consciousness into passionate delight; it went on fluttering in the swampy ground where it was hatched, thinking of its wings and never flying. His experience was of that pitiable kind which shrinks from pity, and fears most of all that it should be

known: it was that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy, and quivers thread-like in small currents of self-preoccupation or at best of an egoistic scrupulosity. (279; ch. 29)

Considering Casaubon's guarded hypersensitivity, there is hardly a wonder that, for all her eagerness, Dorothea fails to connect with him. He is lost in the endless maze of his futile scholarly labors: "With his taper stuck before him he forgot the absence of windows, and in bitter manuscript remarks on other men's notions about the solar deities, he had become indifferent to the sunlight" (197; ch. 20). The last quote indicates the extreme dessication of Casaubon's values and priorities in its illustration of his preference for artificial light—or dry, acrid scholarly disputation—over the sun—or life itself. Mr. Casaubon, in short, is as ill-equipped to be a mentor as Raffles or Peter Featherstone would be.

The question naturally arises from this discussion of Casaubon: Why on earth would Dorothea, in her desire for a mentor, choose someone so unfitting? The answer is that she blinds herself to his true character, imagining him instead to be the wise mentor she dreams will liberate her from the ignorance and limitations inherent in a provincial Victorian woman's upbringing and education. Eliot's presentation of Dorothea's self-deception in regard to Mr. Casaubon is astute in its anticipation of what Freud would call projection (*Psycho-Analytic Notes on a Case of Paranoia* 66):

Dorothea . . . had looked deep into the ungauged reservoir of Mr Casaubon's mind, seeing reflected there in vague labyrinthine extension every quality she herself brought. . . . Signs are small measurable things, but interpretations are

illimitable, and in girls of sweet, ardent nature, every sign is apt to conjure up wonder, hope, belief, vast as a sky, and coloured by a diffused thimbleful of matter in the shape of knowledge. (24-25; ch. 3)

Though her reaching out for a mentor's guidance would seem to indicate that Dorothea would make an ideal mentee, her subtle self-absorption is revealed in the telling fact that she is not really seeing Casaubon but rather the man she would like him to be. A true mentoring relationship begins with the clash between the self-focused mentee and the claims of the outside world, represented by the mentor. In the early days when Dorothea longs for a wise, fatherly mentor, she is still engaged with nothing but her own fantasies. Circumstances have, in fact, provided Dorothea with a mentor: her sister Celia, who has the sharp-sightedness to identify many of "Dodo's" foibles. But Dorothea has an ideal mentor in mind and thinks she has found him in Mr. Casaubon. She refuses to take Celia seriously as a mentor. The clash Dorothea finally experiences and works through, without the benefit of a mentor's guidance, is the realization that there are other centers of consciousness, very different from her own; that, in short, Mr. Casaubon will never be the man she wants him to be.

Rosamond, like Dorothea, bases her hopes and dreams concerning her future husband on a bare modicum of knowledge about him. The fact which excludes all others in importance, in her opinion, is that Lydgate's uncle is a baronet, "which offered [Rosamond] vistas of that middle-class heaven, rank. . ." (118; ch. 12). As for Lydgate's passion for medical research, Rosamond glosses over it except insofar as she can harness it to her own ambition: "it seemed desirable that Lydgate should by-and-by get some

first-rate position elsewhere than in Middlemarch; and this could hardly be difficult in the case of a man who had a titled uncle and could make discoveries” (356; ch. 36). Note the precedence of the titled uncle. When Lydgate falls into debt, Rosamond’s attitude toward him is one of grievance for the pain she has suffered in the circumstance. It does not occur to her that marriage means sharing the burden with her husband. Instead, she acts unilaterally behind Lydgate’s back, countermanding Lydgate’s orders to the house agent to sell their house and writing Lydgate’s uncle, Sir Godwin, to ask for money. To the end of Lydgate’s life, Rosamond continues to use him for her own purposes. Lydgate finally surrenders, becomes a physician to the wealthy in London and “a Continental bathing place,” writes “a treatise on Gout, a disease which has a good deal of wealth on its side,” and dies young, “leaving his wife and children provided for by a heavy insurance on his life” (834; Finale). He contents himself with the bitter recourse of calling Rosamond “his basil plant; and when she asked for an explanation, [he] said that basil was a plant which had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man’s brains” (835; Finale).

Submitting herself to Lydgate’s guidance is something that Rosamond in effect refuses to do though she never voices her disobedience directly. It is a standard feature of mentoring relationships that the mentee resist the mentor’s guidance initially, but the mentee’s eventual submission to and acceptance of the mentor is a step Rosamond has no intention of taking. Instead, Lydgate acknowledges his own defeat, bending to “her dumb mastery” (740; ch. 73).

The conquering of Lydgate cannot be attributed entirely to Rosamond’s unassisted prowess. Lydgate himself must share the responsibility. Just as Dorothea fails to see

Casaubon for who he is, Lydgate grossly misjudges Rosamond, assuming that her physical beauty is an outward sign of what he considers a lovely character in a wife: charm made even more attractive by obedience. He sees Rosamond initially as

an accomplished creature who venerated his high musings and momentous labours and would never interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts with still magic, yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and transform life into romance at any moment; who was instructed to the true womanly limit and not a hair's-breadth beyond—docile, therefore, and ready to carry out behests which came from beyond that limit. (352; ch. 36)

Lydgate, in short, wants an angel in the house: a wife who is a Victorian man's dream. This woman does not exist except to serve her husband; every trait, skill, and grace she possesses should serve this end. She is not a person; she is rather a genie whose existence is dedicated solely to carrying out the wishes of her master. Lydgate's desire for such a woman is so strong that he cannot see Rosamond's intractability. She is, in reality, the last woman with whom he can be happy. Eliot uses her famous web metaphor in part to describe the mutual self-deception that Lydgate and Rosamond engage in together and the ensuing entanglement with which they bind themselves to each other.

The advantage Mary and Fred have over the other two mentoring couples is the fact that they see and accept each other for what they are. They have known each other since childhood, since the days when Fred "espoused [Mary] with the umbrella ring when she wore socks and little strapped shoes" (517; ch. 52). Their acceptance of each other does not preclude, at least on Mary's part, a desire to see the other become better than he

presently is. As I show in Chapter 5, Mary fully embraces the role of moral critic in her mentoring of Fred. Mary's and Fred's acceptance of each other is shown primarily in the openness and honesty which characterize their relationship. Openness and honesty, though desired by both Dorothea and Lydgate, are qualities that both Casaubon and Rosamond shun in their mentoring relationships, which fail in large part as a consequence.

If any of Eliot's mentoring relationships qualify for the label *tragic*, Casaubon-Dorothea and Lydgate-Rosamond would be those relationships. Mary-Fred, by contrast, is a comic mentoring relationship. The crux of its comedy is the gender reversal, by which Mary gains but Fred loses in dignity. For Fred, being a mentee is a demotion from the mentor standard, which represents the height of manly virtue. For a man to be so pitiable a soul as to need a mentor is an absurdity best addressed by a comic treatment. Such a man is revealing himself to be "womanish" since to need a mentor is the typical position for women. Thus Fred is the butt of much humor concerning his unrealistic, wholly narcissistic optimism, which leads him to believe that he alone is the special darling of an ever-accommodating universe.

To understand why *Middlemarch* presents two mentoring relationships which fail so miserably and one which succeeds only in a comically distorted form of the standard pattern, it is helpful to examine a scene which appears at first to be fairly unimportant. The scene takes place in Chapter 24 and does not even involve any of the novel's major mentors and mentees. However, like the Dolly-Silas relationship but in a more encapsulated form, it presents a parody of the mentoring situation and stands as a kind of

emblem of the dysfunctional or, at best, nonstandard mentoring relationships in this novel. In this scene, Mrs. Garth, Mary's mother, is giving her youngest son and daughter, Ben and Letty, their lessons "in peripatetic fashion" (243) while she goes about her domestic duties in the kitchen. While she makes up her apple puffs, she "expound[s] with grammatical fervour what were the right views about the concord of verbs and pronouns with 'nouns of multitude and signifying many'" (244). Later on the same page, Eliot inserts a paragraph entirely enclosed in parentheses, which seems to provide a clue to understanding the mentoring failures of *Middlemarch*: "(Mrs Garth, like more celebrated educators, had her favourite ancient paths, and in a general wreck of society would have tried to hold her 'Lindley Murray' above the waves.)" (244). Lindley Murray, according to the notes in the Penguin edition of the novel, was the author of *English Grammar* (1795), a "standard schoolbook . . . in the 1820s" (Ashton 845).

Mrs. Garth has asked Ben to explicate what is evidently a passage from the *Grammar*: "'Not without regard to the import of the word as conveying unity or plurality of idea'" (244). Because Ben's better powers of concentration have been commandeered by the apple puff just then under construction, he replies impatiently, "'Oh—it means—you must think what you mean. . . . I hate grammar. What's the use of it?'" His mother answers "with severe precision," "'To teach you to speak and write correctly, so that you can be understood'" (244). After some dialogue concerning the poor language acquirements of the family servant Job, Mrs. Garth consolidates her point with further exposition:

“Job has only to speak about very plain things. How do you think you would write or speak about anything more difficult, if you knew no more of grammar than he does? You would use wrong words, and put words in the wrong places, and instead of making people understand you, they would turn away from you as a tiresome person. What would you do then?” (245)

Mrs. Garth’s stern attempt to mentor Ben here is met with this unsatisfactory reply: “I shouldn’t care, I should leave off,” with, the narrator adds, “a sense that this was an agreeable issue where grammar was concerned” (245). Mrs. Garth’s other mentee is equally unpromising, or more so, in her severe maternal eyes, since this exacting mentor is prejudiced in favor of the male sex. Letty meets with her mother’s disapproval in this scene: ““Letty, I am ashamed of you. . . .How rude you look, pushing and frowning, as if you wanted to conquer with your elbows! Cincinnatus, I am sure, would have been sorry to see his daughter behave so’” (245).

The mentoring parody provided by this scene emphasizes with comic exaggeration the yawning gap that can exist between the austere mentor and the foolish mentee(s) that is (are) about as susceptible to direction as a flock of geese. Ben and Letty presumably grow up to become responsible adults, but at this stage in their development, they are far from comprehending the moral and intellectual heights to which their mother wants to introduce them. That moment of greatest disjunction between mentor and mentee occurs in all mentoring relationships, even the most successful, early on before the mentee comes to accept the mentor. By crystallizing it here in this parody, Eliot pauses to dwell on the vast disparateness between mentor and mentee, living as they do in two different

worlds: objective and subjective (Paris 19). The mentor, in tune with the outside world, possesses a viewpoint which is objective, in contrast to the mentee's egotism, which shuts the world out in its all-consuming subjectivity—or rather, appropriates it to its own purposes rather than allowing it its own autonomous existence.

The image of Mrs. Garth holding Lindley Murray's *Grammar* aloft to save it from being lost at sea along with the rest of civilization is far from parenthetical in a novel like *Middlemarch*. *Middlemarch* contains, after all, several disheartening portrayals of the many ways that human beings fail to connect with each other and fail to fulfill their own potential. The two tragic mentoring relationships I focus on in this chapter are among these portrayals. While Mary and Fred form a happy union, their relationship is haunted by the loss both Mary and Mr. Farebrother suffer by Fred's selfish insistence on his own precedence in Mary's affections. Connections are being severed on the level of class as well: the novel is set at the time of the 1832 Reform Bill when the interests of the laboring classes were pointedly being set over against those of the landowning and educated classes within the political process. Chapters 39 and 51 depict humorously the collisions of the gentleman farmer/landlord and Liberal candidate Mr. Brooke with members of a laboring class newly aware of themselves as having political identities. In Chapter 56 Eliot portrays the upheaval, simultaneous with Reform, caused to traditional rural life by the construction of the railways. Mr. Garth, who is both more sensitive to the concerns of the working people and closer to them in rank than Mr. Brooke, successfully persuades a crowd of laborers to promise not to threaten the railroad crews.

George Eliot reveals in this novel her pessimism about the state of society, which she portrays even more openly in the devastating portrait of the English upper classes in *Daniel Deronda*, especially in the corrupt figure of Grandcourt. Her concern is that divisive relationships—whether on the interpersonal, social, or political level—can only detract from wholesome human life. Eliot’s humorous characterization of Mrs. Garth stalwartly protecting her precious cultural treasure, Murray’s *Grammar*, from the merciless ocean waves presents an unexpected proposed solution to Eliot’s vision of the degradation of civilized life. Mrs. Garth’s immediate concerns are “the concord of verbs and pronouns with ‘nouns of multitude or signifying many’” and “‘the import of the word as conveying unity or plurality of idea’.” A “general wreck of society” is a state in which unity is drowning in the ocean depths of multiplicity. Lindley Murray’s *Grammar* is the authority which enables Mrs. Garth to elucidate “with grammatical fervour . . . the right views about the concord of verbs and pronouns with ‘nouns of multitude or signifying many . . .’” Her “fervour” rests on the belief that correct language use is indispensable in mutual human understanding: without it, she informs Ben, “[y]ou would use wrong words, and put words in the wrong places, and instead of making people understand you, they would turn away from you as a tiresome person’.” Clutching the *Grammar* tightly and holding it high above the waves of chaos, Mrs. Garth believes that some “concord” can be reached with the disintegrative forces of multiplicity, that perhaps unity can somehow be recovered that way.

Eliot does not, however, shirk the difficulties involved or present this as an easily achieved end. The unity produced by mutual understanding is precisely what is missing

in the two failed mentoring pairs of *Middlemarch*. All four of these characters begin their relationships bedecked in the gauzy film of illusion. Dorothea thinks she is marrying a man of profound wisdom; furthermore, she believes that the scholarly world she expects Casaubon to open to her will provide the answers to her existential questionings.

Casaubon, in his turn, thinks Dorothea will be an uncritical source of support, acting in the role of meek and loyal secretary to his scholarly labors. To Rosamond, Lydgate is her ticket out of provincial Middlemarch and into the world beyond of high society and fashion. Lydgate views Rosamond as a conventional female: beautiful, delicate, possessed of the requisite feminine “accomplishments,” and lacking a mind or will of her own. Each of these perspectives is grossly mistaken, and both relationships suffer irreparable damage as a result.

In *Middlemarch* George Eliot declines to present a standard mentoring relationship. Instead, she includes mentoring relationships that exhibit various degrees of distortion, from the mild, comic distortion produced by a gender switch to the gross distortion produced by a failure of the most cherished ideals of mentoring. In Chapter 5, I discuss the comic aspects of Mary and Fred’s relationship more fully. Here, I simply note that much of the comedy turns on the spectacle of Fred as a man who falls far short of the ideal manly virtue a typical male mentor displays and who, therefore, is relegated to the inferior status of mentee. Where Mary-Fred represents mentoring comedy in the novel, the other two relationships represent mentoring tragedy. In those relationships, no erring soul is granted moral redemption, which, to Eliot’s mind, is the high purpose of the mentoring relationships. The only enlightenment that exists in these two relationships is

the bitter disillusionment these characters experience when they realize the irreparable errors they have made in choosing to cast their lots with unsuitable partners. Only Dorothea and Lydgate manage to redeem their ruined marriages somewhat by making the decision to accept their spouses as they are, with love. This act on their parts does not change the bleakness of their situations, however, for Casaubon and Rosamond remain unable to give or respond to love.

Mrs. Garth's solution, finally, proves insufficient for addressing the mentoring tragedies in *Middlemarch*. They cast an obstinately dark shadow on the novel, unelucidated by grammars or well-functioning mentoring relationships or other systems or devices which are devised to bring order to chaos. Dorothea's second marriage, to Will Ladislaw, does provide a ray of hope; Will is certainly wreathed throughout the novel with the imagery of light. Dorothea finds her happiness there in a relationship of equals. The action taking place in the 1830s, Will of course must be the Member of Parliament and Dorothea only his helpmate and mother of his children. But the imbalance inherent in a mentoring relationship plays no part in this marriage. Neither is there the drama of moral salvation, which is the heart of Eliot's mentoring relationships. Dorothea and Will are simply two people who have chosen to live and love together. It would be tempting to think that at this point Eliot had decided that mentoring relationships had worn themselves out for her as a major fictional device. However, in the novel following *Middlemarch*, *Daniel Deronda*, she girds herself for the most elaborate effort contained in all her fiction to present the mentoring relationship as a vehicle of salvation. For her English heroines, Eliot seems to find mentoring situations

vital. She doesn't trust herself to allow a heroine to become independent of the mentoring situation unless she can incorporate some distancing factors into the narrative as she does in *Romola*, which is the subject of Chapter 8.

NOTES

¹ See Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 8

ROMOLA, A FANTASY FEMINIST: A MENTEE BREAKS FREE

The setting of *Romola* is significant because its geographical and chronological distance from George Eliot's other novels allowed her the psychological distance she needed to free her mentee character from certain restraints. It is her only novel set outside English society and at a time in the relatively distant past. Fifteenth-century Florence was a setting that enabled Eliot to step away from the prescriptive and proscriptive mores by which Victorian society dictated proper behavior, especially for women. The result of this artistic freedom was Eliot's creation of a mentee who achieves the greatest degree of independence from her mentor.

George Eliot unconsciously, unavoidably identified with her characters—especially her female characters—whose stories take place in nineteenth-century England. In most cases, as in *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch*, the stories are set a few generations previous to the actual time in which George Eliot was writing. But still the culture portrayed in these novels is “home” to Eliot. These home associations bore much that was dear to Marian Lewes but also much that was painful. Whenever she and George Henry Lewes left England for one of their many continental trips or left London for the countryside, Marian's health improved considerably.¹ In London she was always plagued with a variety of ailments, mainly headache. Her health was worse whenever she was working on a book; so the pressures of creativity, the need of an anxious ambition to “top” the

quality and success of her previous works, the expectations—real and perceived—of her audience must be taken into account. But also the pain of social ostracism and exile from her family caused by her irregular union with Lewes must be considered a major contributor to Marian's poor health while in London. When they vacationed in the English countryside, they generally lived in "dual solitude," reading, writing, and walking many hours each day. Their visits to the Continent were spent among people with more liberal, tolerant attitudes about sexual mores than were sanctioned in English society. On the Continent they were accepted into society as a couple. Marian did not have to stay at home while George actively conducted a solo social life as was the case in London.²

The freedom from constraint and from the fear of censorious judgment and hurtful gossip that George Eliot experienced on the Continent is perceptible in *Romola*. With a fifteenth-century Florentine heroine, Eliot could abstract herself imaginatively from her own time, place, and culture. She could allow this heroine to take risks, to be more than she could have been in nineteenth-century England. *Romola*, unlike Esther or Gwendolen, for instance, is well-educated—and not just with a woman's education. Her father, Bardo gives her the same education a son would have received; indeed, *Romola's* role in the home she shares with her father is that of a surrogate son since her brother, Dino, has abdicated his duty as a son by entering Savonarola's monastery. *Romola* walks freely and independently through the streets of Florence. She can also choose to leave Florence when she wishes. When she does leave, her doing so, set over against Savonarola's earlier command not to do so, becomes a symbol of her independence from him. Her journey away from Florence takes her to a village dying of plague. Her sudden,

radiant appearance in the village and her subsequent efforts to help the villagers cause them to apotheosize her as the “Holy Mother.” As the strongest of Eliot’s mentees, Romola is in the least need of the moral education offered by the mentor. Nevertheless, her moral sensibilities have been refined by Savonarola’s tutelage at this point in the novel. Therefore, it is not too farfetched to see that Eliot intends to imply that Romola has achieved a kind of moral saintliness which she manifests in her work in the plague-stricken village.³

Romola is on her journey away from Florence and her loveless marriage to Tito when she is stopped by Savonarola, who counsels her on the virtue of a self-abnegating faithfulness to her worthless husband and to the poor and suffering of Florence. She resists his overture angrily at first, but as she listens to him, she begins to be “subdued by the sense of something unspeakably great to which she [is] being called by a strong being who rouse[s] a new strength within herself” (436; ch. 40). Romola accepts Savonarola as her mentor, obeying him by returning to Florence. Once there, she becomes one of his followers and devotes herself to the service of the sick and hungry while continuing in her hollow marriage.

To understand Romola’s experience of accepting a mentor in its immediate context, it is helpful to examine closely the brief passage quoted in the previous paragraph. The extended passage begins with Savonarola speaking:

“[I]t may be our blessedness . . . to die daily by the crucifixion of our selfish will—to die at last by laying our bodies on the altar. . . .Bear the anguish and the smart. . . .The draught is bitterness on the lips. But there is rapture in the cup—

there is the vision which makes all life below it dross for ever. Come, my daughter, come back to your place!”

While Savonarola spoke with growing intensity, . . . his face alight as from an inward flame, Romola felt herself surrounded and possessed by the glow of his passionate faith. The chill doubts all melted away; she was subdued by the sense of something unspeakably great to which she was being called by a strong being who roused a new strength within herself. In a voice that was like a low, prayerful cry, she said—

“Father, I will be guided. Teach me! I will go back.” (436; ch. 40)

Romola is being called to some ineffable reality whose “greatness” infuses her with “a new strength.” This new strength will give her the courage to pay the price Savonarola names for the promised rapture: “the crucifixion of [her] selfish will.” Savonarola’s stress on the sacrifice of the “selfish will” is fitting: self-abnegation is familiar as a Christian virtue.⁴ Despite Marian Lewes’ abandonment of the orthodox Christian viewpoint of her youth, she shares with Christian thought a belief in the impoverishment of the ego. The ego, in her view, can only be brought to wholeness by the person’s transcendence of the ego in fellowship with others.⁵ In the passage quoted above, Savonarola is calling Romola to make the leap into this transcendence, to pass beyond the narrow boundaries of her own ego. Romola responds favorably at last out of a desire to escape her current subjective state of being trapped within her own psyche. Her desire for self-transcendence betrays her sense of barren existential isolation. As she listens to Savonarola, however, she feels “surrounded and possessed” by “his passionate faith.”

She is no longer alone—even intrapsychically, as the word *possessed* implies. The imagery of the light and warmth of fire contributes associations of comforting human fellowship, perhaps gathered around a hearth.

The bond which holds human community together for George Eliot is her great watchword: sympathy. The Christian root of Eliot's sympathy is agape: divine, sacrificial love. Her abandonment of Christianity was only the abandonment of its metaphysical trappings; she wanted to retain its moral imperatives. On a more emotional (or perhaps more subliminal) level, sympathy is the only quality that renders existential loneliness somewhat more bearable. The existential loneliness that Marian must have felt after having dethroned the transcendent yet immanent Father God of Christianity would have been intensified by the form of Christian influence she had submitted herself to in her youth and early adulthood. As mentioned in the Appendix, Mary Ann adopted a decidedly Evangelical form of Christianity under the guidance of her teacher Maria Lewis though she remained a member of the Church of England. Her subsequent rejection of the Evangelical God was the banishment of a constant presence, a Divine Companion to whom she had been accustomed daily to bare her soul's secrets, trivial and great. In a godless universe existential isolation threatens to engulf us: all we have is each other. With God removed from the cosmos, the primary human love becomes love of humanity. Our very identity founders in this void unless we cling to other human beings.

While the atheistic humanist Feuerbach was the mentor who helped Marian through her religious crisis, she gives her mentee character Romola a zealous Christian reformer to be her guide. When Romola first perceives the comforting light in Savonarola's

countenance, it is still a light in the distance: she is not yet a member of the community which will banish her isolation. He is the “strong being” who will lead Romola out of her state of isolated entrapment within herself into the enrichment of community with others. In Christian thought the “strong being” who holds the power to free the self is God, specifically the Holy Spirit. In Eliot’s mentor-mentee relationships, it is the mentor who stands in the same relation to the mentee as God the Holy Spirit does to the soul. The mentor, the “strong being,” has a power greater than anything the mentee has ever experienced: the power to take her beyond herself. In the passage quoted above, Romola wants this power and is gratified by the “new strength” she perceives is forming within herself as she admits and accepts Savonarola’s influence. Romola desires the power Savonarola offers her; paradoxically, she must give up her ego autonomy in order to gain it. However, in the end, Romola never quite brings herself to pay such a staggering price. She maintains an independence from Savonarola that indicates that she does not finally make this necessary sacrifice. Romola foregoes the ethical self-transcendence Savonarola has prescribed for her. She remains closer to her native earth as symbolized by the fact at the novel’s end that she has incorporated the peasant Tessa and her illegitimate children into her household.

In her first movement toward accepting a mentor, however, Romola does partially resign her ego autonomy. Initially, she seems to find spiritual solace in this flight from herself:

Romola arose from her knees. [Savonarola’s] silent attitude had been a sort of sacrament to her, confirming the state of yearning passivity on which she had

newly entered. By the one act of renouncing her resolve to quit her husband, her will seemed so utterly bruised that she felt the need of direction even in small things. (437; ch. 41)

Romola experiences this early moment of submission to Savonarola as a freeing occurrence. What she seeks to be freed from, to use standard Freudian terminology, is an embodied psyche composed of merely an id, ego, and superego. To depart from Freud and move closer to Jung, viewing the embodied psyche this way is to leave out the spiritual component; this view is, therefore, incomplete. According to Jungian psychology, with the recognition of the spiritual component, the embodied psyche becomes whole: it becomes the self. Jung names this process the individuation process, which takes place through the integration of unconscious contents into consciousness. The act of integration brings about a transformation of both the ego and the unconscious contents:

[T]he ego cannot help discovering that the afflux of unconscious contents has vitalized the personality, enriched it and created a figure that somehow dwarfs the ego in scope and intensity. This experience paralyzes an over-egocentric will and convinces the ego that in spite of all difficulties it is better to be taken down a peg than to get involved in a hopeless struggle in which one is invariably handed the dirty end of the stick. In this way the will, as disposable energy, gradually subordinates itself to the stronger factor, namely to the new totality-figure I call the *self*. (224)

According to Eliot, sympathy, which connects human beings to each other, takes the

embodied psyche out of the prison of individuality in an attempt to become the self. However, Eliot's method for most mentees involves not an assimilating but rather a stifling of unconscious contents as well as a damaging of ego boundaries with a concomitant weakening of the ego. Romola's experience is different in the end only because, in an assertion of ego strength, she chooses to walk away from the mentoring process altogether. Romola achieves the creation of self, but not by means of the standard "help" mentees generally receive from their mentors.

Eliot mistakenly believes that the route to the self necessarily involves bypassing the embodied psyche. She believes that self and embodied psyche are antithetical, mutually exclusive. This belief she derives from Christian thought: the self is the holy, redeemed, Christlike soul while the embodied psyche is the fallen, sinful human nature that needs redeeming. When we view embodied psyche and self this way, we are looking at before-and-after pictures: in order for self to rise to life, embodied psyche must be crucified. Christianity—at least in the Neoplatonic guise that dominated the West—only grudgingly accepts that the basic needs of the body and the simple psyche continue throughout life. The Neoplatonic Christian view is that we remain in our fallen state until the day of our glorious resurrection when we will have left the mortal shell behind. The unredeemed state is lamentable, but thanks to the action of God, we can be made new and better creatures, transformed into holiness.

A more normative view sees the embodied psyche as the bedrock upon which the self must be built; without it, the self collapses into nothing. The starting-point, the embodied psyche, is the irreducible psychobiological given of human existence. It is the breathing

body of Plato: no sublime systems of thought can come into being if respiration stops. In order for human beings to develop the spiritual component of their lives, they must begin with the body and the simple psyche and their needs for food, water, air; for love, intellectual stimulation, and self-actualization. And these needs continue from birth to death; they are not lower phases which we can and should supercede or transcend. The spiritual component coexists with these more basic needs and, in fact, should be viewed as a basic need as well. This more nature-based approach does not rate the self as a more valuable state of being than the embodied psyche. The embodied psyche seeking to develop self is not intent on escaping itself. Its characteristics are self-acceptance and self-love, not self-loathing and self-hatred. Only embodied psyche can become self. The embodied psyche is the seat of identity. An abandoned embodied psyche is not a self; it is only a nonentity. The healthy self, then, encompasses all the functions and components of the embodied psyche, including the spiritual dimension.

Though Romola looks to Savonarola to help her develop her self, she has already achieved much growth in this area on her own. She does not need him as much as she thinks at first that she does. This initial sense of neediness gives her a momentary similarity to the English mentees. But Romola's eventual break with Savonarola displays a divergence from the pattern. Her independence, growing out of the choice to live by her own values, distinguishes her from most of George Eliot's English mentees. From the beginning of her relationship with Savonarola, Romola discerns his limitations, which coexist with what she perceives as his greatness, and, therefore, she gives him only partial allegiance. She bears with Savonarola's narrowness and fanaticism because she believes

he has a great vision of a community of love. Romola follows Savonarola's teachings, then, not because she is incapable of self-direction but because these teachings are in line with her own values. While she is still among the ranks of his followers, Romola is selective about which aspects of Savonarola's teaching she will accept and which she won't. The following passage exemplifies her selectivity:

In spite of the wearisome visions and allegories from which she recoiled in disgust when they came as stale repetitions from other lips than [Savonarola's], her strong affinity for his passionate sympathy and the splendour of his aims had lost none of its power. . . .She thought little about dogmas, and shrank from reflecting closely on the Frate's [Savonarola's] prophecies of the immediate scourge and closely-following regeneration. She had submitted her mind to his and had entered into communion with the Church, because in this way she had found an immediate satisfaction for moral needs which all the previous culture and experience of her life had left hungering. . . .Romola was so deeply moved by the grand energies of Savonarola's nature, that she found herself listening patiently to all dogmas and prophecies, when they came in the vehicle of his ardent faith and believing utterance. (463-65; ch. 44)

Romola distinguishes between what she perceives as Savonarola's "passionate sympathy" and his tedious prophecies and dogmas, mentally dismissing the latter as she focuses on the former. In so doing, she is acting in order to fulfil her own "moral needs" and purposes.

Later, however, when Savonarola refuses for political reasons to intercede for her

godfather Bernardo del Nero, who is threatened with execution, she breaks with him in anger and disillusionment. Finally, Romola is able to forgive Savonarola and recover her sympathy and respect for him because she revalues her criteria for respect. She realizes that she can accept Savonarola in sympathy as a flawed human being and still respect him for his noble qualities. Nevertheless, Romola has no further direct contact with Savonarola. His star has set by this time, and he is executed. The novel ends with Romola secure in her independence, heading a household that includes Tessa, the now-dead Tito's mistress and their children. In this household there is no man in sight; in fact, at this point, all the major male characters are dead.

Thus, Romola never fully qualifies as a mentee because she never completely resigns her ego autonomy. She never becomes totally dependent on the mentor, acting in unquestioning obedience to him, as most of the English mentees do. She exhibits, on the contrary, a mental strength in the mentor-mentee relationship that is unusual among the mentees. Her actions, therefore, are weightier than those of most of the other mentees. Romola is unconstrained by her tie to either her husband or her mentor once she decides that these men are morally unworthy of her. She walks away from these repudiated bonds and becomes the savior of an entire village. Few even of Eliot's male characters demonstrate such power. Romola's independence, her living by her own lights in order to accomplish her own goals, goes against the grain of Eliot's intention, which is to show the purity of Romola's selflessness. Romola's "self-centeredness" or self-possession—only thinly veiled by Eliot's effort to wrap her in altruistic selflessness—is a sign of her psychological integrity.

Like Esther and Gwendolen, Romola begins with a notable degree of self-possession. The self-possession of Esther and Gwendolen is cocky and falsely self-assured. Romola's is truer and more dignified. This distinction partly explains Eliot's leveling the pride of Esther and Gwendolen while allowing Romola largely to retain her dignity. Nevertheless, all three must undergo an episode of deflation which signals the beginning of the mentoring relationship. This is the moment when the mentor's criticism of the mentee pierces her egotistic defenses and all that hot air rushes out to leave her a crumpled remnant of her self. The mentor then begins the process of filling the mentee with the qualities that he and Eliot approve of: selflessness, humility, awareness of a wider world beyond her former petty concerns.

Though Romola regains her independence, the other two (along with most of the other mentees) remain dependent on their mentors to varying degrees. One reason for this is that Romola's mentor is the most severely flawed of the three. Conversely, Gwendolen, who is most in need of a mentor and most dependent on him, receives a mentor unbesmirched by the hint of a flaw. Felix and Esther fall predictably in the middle: he is basically a virtuous, principled man who has the minor character flaw of blunt outspokenness; and she voluntarily submits to his guidance, not out of abject need but out of a submission to cultural convention.

The mentees' power to act varies accordingly: Romola's power to act—even in opposition to her mentor or her husband—is fettered only by her own will. Esther willingly enters into a typical English marriage where Felix, who turns out to be a very conservative radical, is her lord and master. Gwendolen, by contrast, takes only two

consequential actions in *Daniel Deronda*⁶: to her own peril, she marries Grandcourt (who is a cruel tyrant rather than a loving master as Felix is) in order to gain financial support for her mother and sisters; and she turns to Daniel Deronda to save her from the mental hell she finds herself in after taking the first action. Despite Gwendolen's strong personality and all her pretensions early in the novel, considering that these are her only two consequential actions enables us to see her essential weakness as a character. Both actions are movements of dependence. Gwendolen is at the mercy of two strong male characters, Grandcourt and Deronda.

Leaving out Esther for the moment in order to look at the extremes, we can see that such a contrast between a strong, independent mentee of a distant time and place and a weak, dependent mentee representing home for George Eliot shows her depiction of the not-real as opposed to the real. George Eliot's stories of English mentees embody with grim realism the experience of most middle-class women in nineteenth-century England: a crippling dependence on men. The curious thing is that Romola, the foreigner of an ancient day, lives a life much closer to Marian Lewes' own in terms of the freedom and independence they both enjoyed. The difference between the two is that Romola's culture (at least as depicted in the novel) is more accepting of such freedom and independence whereas Marian had to boldly defy her culture in order to wrest from it what was then a male privilege: the freedom to pursue self-authentication. Among feminists such as Kate Millett (139) and Lee Edwards (223-38), this is one of the big, unsolved questions of George Eliot scholarship: why did she press on her English heroines (especially her mentees) a dysfunctional self-abnegation that she herself declined

to take on? I believe part of the reason is that she (rightly) regarded herself as exceptional among English women while she was devoted to depicting common life in her fiction.

Another part of the answer lies in her conservatism, which grew deeper over the course of her life. This conservatism grew up in part and perhaps unconsciously out of a fear of the moral and conventional lawlessness of her own behavior: trespassing into the male preserve of intellect, scholarship, and serious authorship; and living openly with a married man. What would society be like if every woman were as bold and brazen as to actualize herself in the way that she, Marian Evans, had? Even her assumption of Lewes' name as if she were his wife was an attempt to cover over her socially outrageous act.

(Her intellectual sins were more easily forgiven by society. Bluestockings had been a part of the English cultural scene for a century.)

Romola, who is never in danger of losing her respectability, who has righteousness on her side, and yet who is not required to sacrifice her freedom and independence, is, in the end, a fantasy for Marian Lewes. She is a dream of what life would be like for a strong, independent woman in a culture that is not so threatened by such a woman. In this dream society, a woman doesn't need a mentor to find her way in life because she holds the same inner resources that any man—even any mentor—possesses. She is free to develop her self to its full potential.

NOTES

¹ Two quotes from Marian's letters illustrate the difference in her feelings about being in London and periodically escaping from it: to Clementia Taylor, she wrote on March 25, 1864: "Mr. Lewes tells me the country air has always a magical effect on me, even in the first hour. But it is not the air alone, is it? It is the wide sky and the hills and the wild flowers which are linked with all calming thoughts, just as every object in town has its perturbing associations" (139). And to Barbara Bodichon, she wrote on August 19, 1863: "I come back to London, and again the air is full of demons" (102).

² Gradually men and even some women began to call on the Leweses in London, but Marian never had full freedom to return or make social calls. She claimed this was merely her preference.

³ It is always important to remember, however, that while Eliot, whose upbringing was steeped in the Christian worldview, uses Christian imagery and symbols from time to time, she does so in the same way as Feuerbach. Both translate Christian terms into humanistic ones. Thus Romola as the "Holy Mother" is functioning as an example of humanity at its moral best, which constitutes divinity, transcendence being out of the question.

⁴ Dorothea Barrett points out that "[s]ubmissiveness is a positivist virtue, that is to say a Christian virtue rationalized into secular application by positivist philosophy" (42). Marian Lewes was interested in Comtean positivism almost all her adult life and sympathized warmly with the values and aims of Comte's religion of humanity. However, she never identified herself fully as a positivist.

⁵ I differ here from John Kucich, who maintains in *Repression in Victorian Fiction: Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens* that George Eliot undercuts her avowed focus on community by presenting protagonists whose repression constitutes for them a rich, “libidinal” interiority and who are in the end more interested in remaining separate from others than in forging communal links (116).

⁶ I have not included Gwendolen’s monumental hesitation at the moment of Grandcourt’s drowning because, strictly speaking, it is an inaction rather than an action. This consequential inaction does, however, nicely display Gwendolen’s powerlessness: she can only get what she wants in that situation by refraining from acting.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION: MORAL MENTORING AS COVERT CHRISTIANITY

The many variations on the mentoring relationship pattern that appear in George Eliot's fiction bear witness to the compelling nature of this theme for her. The spectacle of an egotistic woman who is given direction and eventually transformed by a man of great moral compass was one Eliot returned to describe again and again. None of her fictional works lacks elements or variations of the theme, which appears as well in two of her major poems, *The Spanish Gypsy* and "Armgarth." What was it about this theme that drew Eliot to ponder it over the entire span of her artistic career? One answer can be found in Eliot's understanding of the purpose of art. She espoused realism; nevertheless, she saw her artistic function to be primarily that of a moral teacher, making a clear distinction, however, between works of little artistic merit whose only function is didactic and those which convey moral truth in the vehicle of artistic form. As a realist, George Eliot championed a new mimesis, praising Ruskin's formulation of this approach to art:

The truth of infinite value that [Ruskin] teaches is *realism*—the doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality. The thorough acceptance of this doctrine would remould our life . . . ("Art and Belles Lettres" 626).

As the quotation makes clear, Eliot perceived almost no separation between the artist's devotion to realism and her obligation to be a moral guide for her audience. However, as

Eliot's treatment of the mentoring relationships demonstrates, a fissure does exist between the realist's—or humanist's—approach and the moralist's approach. Eliot, who considered herself both a humanist and a realist, is bound by a fundamentally incompatible obligation to morality to “remould” the world rather than accept it and celebrate it for what it is.

In Eliot's moral impulse to “remould our life,” she forsakes over the course of her career the more humanistic aim of realism to attend to, accept, and treasure the life we find around us despite its blemishes and imperfections. Realism was Eliot's predominant artistic ideal in the earliest phase of her fiction-writing career. In the famous artistic manifesto which comprises Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, Eliot espouses realism and its concomitant humanism:

[D]o not impose on us any aesthetic rules which shall banish from the region of Art those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world—those homes with their tin pans, their brown pitchers, their rough curs, and their clusters of onions. In this world there are so many of these common, coarse people, who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! It is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy, and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes. Therefore let Art always remind us of them; therefore let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful

representing of commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them. (180)

It is important to notice that in her earliest fiction, specifically *Scenes of Clerical Life*, during the time when Eliot is still wholeheartedly committed to the realistic approach to fiction, she presents mentees who are not egotists. Caterina and Janet are more misguided than blameworthy, and their mentors' primary task is to reclaim them with the offices of deep human pity. With *Adam Bede* a significant change comes about: despite the fact that Eliot is still making theoretic protestations in favor of realism in this novel as the quotation above shows, the first egotistic mentee, Hetty, also appears on the scene. Eliot is less inclined to accept these mentees lovingly in their human weakness than to rip out the demon root of excessive self-regard from their hardened hearts. Thus, this early on, a crucial transition occurred in Eliot's work: moral teaching began to predominate over humanistic realism though she never lost her gift for acute realistic portraiture.

Another question which emerges from this study is this: What was it about egotism, of all the human vices, that exercised both a revulsion and a fascination upon Eliot? Looking chronologically at the continuum comprising three of the major mentees, Romola, Esther, and Gwendolen, the reader notices in these mentees a pattern of increasing levels of egotism, giving way in the mentoring process to weakness and a greater need for a mentor from one novel to the next. It is as if Eliot, through the mentoring process she subjects them to, is exercising an escalating revenge on her mentees: she is killing them slowly, and each mentee is brought closer to death than the last. Gwendolen is taken to such an extremity that, like the predicament of the

protagonist-narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," it is the *cure* that is killing her. Esther and Gwendolen belong to a line of descent in Eliot's fiction beginning with Hetty in *Adam Bede* and continuing through Bertha in *The Lifted Veil*, Esther, Rosamond in *Middlemarch*, and finally to Gwendolen. These characters are egotistic beauties, and it is no coincidence that all but Bertha are mentees. One significant reason that Bertha is arguably the most chillingly evil of this group of characters is that she has no mentor. Her husband Latimer, who might have played that role, is a weak character who is alienated from her by the repulsion he feels toward her. Eliot's implication is that the egotistic Bertha is irreclaimably lost. Marian Evans, who "wept bitterly" when John Chapman dilated on "the witchery of beauty" (Chapman 172), was a physically ugly person. As a homely but brilliant little girl, Mary Ann never quite fit in, and this pattern continued her entire life. She was always an outsider. There is an unmistakable sense in studying these female characters that George Eliot was able in her treatment of them to strike back at the normal, beautiful darlings of society who were all that she herself was not: approved, admired, envied, flattered, and indulged; and who did what they were supposed to do in life: become elegant, desirable wives and produce handsome families to occupy their well-appointed homes.

Eliot's presentation of the mentee characters reveals egotism to be the cancer at the heart of the rose. Egotism, of course, posed a grave threat to Eliot's cherished ideals of sympathy and community. The isolated, professedly self-sufficient being that cares about nothing but herself was monstrous to Eliot and thus prompted her continually to reenact the narrative of the egotist's conversion. Perhaps the prospect of the egotist's profound

aloneness was intolerable to her. Gordon Haight makes much of the phrenologist George Combe's pronouncement that Mary Ann " 'always requir[ed] some one to lean upon'" and that she was " 'not fitted to stand alone' " (Haight 51; Bray 75). Mary Ann may not have exhibited symptoms severe enough to warrant the diagnosis of Dependent Personality Disorder, but she did share some of the maladaptive traits that her postmentoring heroines show. The need for "someone to lean upon" may indicate a fear that, without that someone, her own existence was dangerously insubstantial.

To extend Feuerbach's line of thought, such a fear is a typical result of the leaching of substance which a transcendental religious system like Christianity performs upon its adherents' perception and valuation of everyday reality. Since only God, at the apex of the system's structure, is considered to have true substance, the substance of everything else must be denied or devalued (Feuerbach 288). The individual's view of himself or herself thus becomes that of something shadowy, inconsequential, hardly there. This weakened state of the ego is a necessary condition of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder, the Dependent Personality Disorder, and a host of other personality disorders and mental illnesses. Thus the mental health of Eliot's mentees, none too robust at the beginning of the mentoring process, suffers damage in the course of it. All the mentees who complete the process must come to the point of accepting that they are nothing while their mentors are all. Marian Evans may have nominally abandoned Christianity, but she retained the mindset virtually unaltered. She no longer recognized a transcendent Father God, but she created little demigods in her mentors, superior in every way to the mortals around them. A self-professed humanist and atheist, Eliot was, for all practical purposes,

a covert Christian still, writing mentoring narratives which are the moral equivalent of resurrection stories.

Of all the mentoring narratives, *Romola* and *Silas Marner* as well as the *Scenes* narratives mentioned above, stand out because, unlike the others, their mentees are not egotists. *Romola* is Eliot's feminist version of the mentoring narrative. A fully developed, independent woman, Romola maintains control over her mentoring process. She derives the spiritual benefit from it that she needs but then makes an unparalleled judgment of her mentor as unworthy of her and carries out the decision to leave him as a result. Eliot was only comfortable embodying this fantasy in a fictional setting far removed from her own nineteenth-century England.

In *Silas Marner*, Eliot places a greater emphasis on redemption by nature, thus remaining closer to Wordsworth's and Feuerbach's understanding of the religious centrality of nature. She does include two egotists among the novel's cast of characters: Godfrey and Dunstan Cass, neither of whom receives a mentor. Dunstan, like Bertha, is irredeemable and is left to his fate. Godfrey, who has a moral conscience of some potential, is allowed to face the consequences of his immoral actions alone. Silas, the " 'poor mused creatur,' " as his neighbors refer to him, stands in no need of moral reform. He is, rather, a victim of the misdeeds of others, especially a friend whom he has trusted. The emotional and spiritual damage Silas suffers is severe, and, at the beginning of the narrative, he is lost in a spiritual desert. He subsists in his own ruined shell of a life, mechanically producing his woven goods in order to keep his body alive and pouring what emotional and spiritual energies that remain to him into the sad compensations of

miserliness. Though Silas is a blameless recipient of harm rather than an egotist, he is the character to whom Eliot assigns the mentors Dolly and nature itself, personified by Eppie. Because he is morally guiltless, the mentoring process can take more the character of a joyful restoration to health. There is no need for the painful transformation which the egotistic mentees must undergo.

A final important consideration which this study must address is the fact that the two novels which contain the most prominent and well-developed of the standard mentor-mentee relationships, *Felix Holt* and *Daniel Deronda*, are widely considered, with *Romola*, to be George Eliot's weakest novels.¹ By the same token, *Middlemarch*, the novel which is universally considered to be Eliot's masterwork, lacks a standard mentoring relationship, containing only a comic version, Mary-Fred, and two failed mentoring relationships, Casaubon-Dorothea and Lydgate-Rosamond. I believe this is no coincidence. *Middlemarch* is a greater novel in part because Eliot has depicted a world which—unlike the one she presents in *Felix Holt*, in particular—is fuzzier, subtler, and more complex. One thing the classic mentor-mentee relationship does—and Felix-Esther does it to a fault—is to present solutions to moral problems with crystal clarity: The mentee is morally lost. The mentor is the keeper of the moral compass. The mentee sees the error of her ways. She follows the mentor. He leads her into the moral high ground. Such an essentially simple scenario is too ideal, however; it does not allow for the inevitable intricacies of life. Eliot, therefore, in allowing the moral imperatives of the fight against egotism to oversimplify her vision, effectively betrays—especially in novels like *Felix Holt*—her early allegiance to realism. In the absence of any standard

mentoring relationships, *Middlemarch* presents a darker vision than that found in any of Eliot's other novels. She declines to provide any *dei ex machinis* in the form of model mentors who can tidy up messy moral situations. She allows failure to occur in the lives of her characters; each must cope with it, well or poorly, in accordance with his or her own resources. Such a strategy on Eliot's part in *Middlemarch* creates a depth and complexity that novels like *Felix Holt* fall far short of.

For her last novel, however, Eliot does not extend the complex vision of *Middlemarch*. *Daniel Deronda* certainly contains a devastatingly dark view of the state of contemporary English society, especially its aristocracy. However, her solution to this is to gather herself up for one last idealistic push, creating the most elaborate mentor-mentee relationship of her fiction. In Gwendolen's story Eliot brilliantly probes the psychological depths of egotism and its transformation into self-abnegating saintliness. The portrait of Gwendolen's psychological transformation is dead center in its perspicacity of insight. The troubling aspect of Eliot's presentation of the mentoring metamorphosis in *Daniel Deronda* and all her other works is in her unquestioning assumption that the individual's value should be determined by serviceability to the community rather than by inner integrity. If, like the transformed mentees, the individual can arrive at the point where her life's purpose is to serve others, that individual's life has value. That individual has now achieved a "high," "wide," "noble" life. Drained of vitality and personality, this mentee can now aspire to a pretentiousness as indomitable as her mentor's. In Eliot's presentation of the mentee's transformation, the character's mental health, her desires and ambitions, her integrity as a human being are not noticed

or considered. These are things the mentees learn to sacrifice in the interest of becoming moral persons. To post-Freudian and post-Jungian readers of Eliot, however, such a value system must be disquieting. A humanistic value system does not need to be based on the medieval Christian hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being, which tries to salvage the honor of humanity by dissociating it from a devalued nature. A more truly humanistic value system would display a deeper respect for the “inherent worth and dignity of every human being” and “the interdependent web of all existence” (Unitarian Universalist Association 2) than does Eliot’s covert Christian demand for self-abnegation in the interest of transcending nature and becoming better than we are.

NOTES

¹ *Romola* is generally considered a failed or at least a flawed novel for two reasons: first, because of the ponderousness with which Eliot's exhaustive historical research hangs upon the narrative; and second, because its title character is considered too unrealistically ideal.

APPENDIX

BIOGRAPHICAL CONNECTIONS: GEORGE ELIOT AS MENTEE AND MENTOR

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Mary Anne Evans' own earliest mentors were her father Robert Evans and her brother Isaac Evans. Robert Evans was employed as estate agent of Arbury Hall by the Newdigate-Newdegate family. As a young man, he had trained to be a carpenter, which was his father's trade. He had little formal education; nevertheless, "Robert Evans by his own efforts . . . made himself a thoroughly competent and versatile man of business" (Haight 1). In later years, George Eliot would capture her loving memories of her father in the characters of both Adam Bede and Caleb Garth. The upright integrity she embodies in both characters is exemplified in Gordon Haight's recording that Robert's "practical knowledge and strict honesty won him the respect of everyone so that he was in great demand as a valuer and arbitrator, sometimes being chosen independently by both sides in a dispute" (2). Frederick Karl sums up Robert's influence on Mary Anne this way: "That the association with Evans was valuable there is no question, since it imbued Mary Anne with a value system she never lost sight of, even as it became translated into her own version of secular humanism" (33). As her father's last illness wore on and his death approached, Mary Ann expressed the fear she faced in the prospect of having to live without his continuing guidance and example: "What shall I be without my Father? It will seem as if a part of my moral nature were gone. I had a horrid vision of myself last night becoming earthly sensual and devilish for want of that purifying restraining

influence” (Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray 284). What Mary Anne primarily learned from this early mentor was the value of integrity in the individual’s world of work and social relations; and the value of tradition and heritage in the life of the nation at large.

As a father, Robert was indulgent, at least to Mary Anne, his youngest child. Biographers confirm that, in writing the following passage in *Middlemarch*, George Eliot was remembering her early childhood privilege of accompanying her father on his business rounds through the midland landscape that remained precious to her all her life:

Little details gave each field a particular physiognomy, dear to the eyes that have looked on them from childhood: the pool in the corner where the grasses were dank and trees leaned whisperingly . . . and the stray hovel, its old, old thatch full of mossy hills and valleys with wondrous modulations of light and shadow such as we travel far to see in later life, and see larger, but not more beautiful. These are the things that make the gamut of joy in landscape to midland-bred souls—the things they toddled among, or perhaps learned by heart standing between their father’s knees while he drove leisurely. (104; ch. 12)

Robert’s affectionate indulgence continued through Mary Anne’s growing up years. Though she went to boarding school at the extremely young age of five, the schools she attended were close to home. Mary Anne was able to go home on weekends and holidays; and, during the week, Robert would send new-laid eggs and other delectables when he was not able to visit himself (Cross 19). When Mary Ann left school and came home to become her father’s housekeeper upon her mother’s death in 1836, Robert supported her in the continuing self-education she vigorously pursued despite the fact that

her doing so was considered “dizzily untraditional and seemingly unfeminine” (Karl 36). Robert allowed her not only to buy books liberally but also in 1840 to hire a tutor to teach her Italian and, later, German.

Mary Anne’s position in her family as the youngest child undoubtedly reinforced her role as mentee, one who “looks up” (as a young child, literally as well as figuratively) to others for guidance and sees others around her as persons to emulate. Until she was twenty-two, Mary Anne was an obedient daughter, embracing her father’s beliefs and values and living in such a way as met with his approval. Her break at that time from her father’s religious belief system was a painful disruption in their relationship. The break, which began with Mary Ann’s refusal to accompany her father to church as usual one Sunday morning in January 1842, was in part her way of asserting her own individuality, the separate adult personhood which distanced her from her father. Interestingly, such a move of independence is exhibited by only one unlikely pair of mentees: Romola and Rosamond.

The psychological and emotional separation Mary Ann made from her father in 1842 did not cause a lasting breach between them. The disturbance was serious enough at the time, however, to compel Robert to bring in family members as well as outsiders to expostulate with Mary Ann on the horrors of apostasy while he himself maintained a frigid silence. Not content with attacking on the spiritual front alone, he also ejected her from their home for some weeks while he put the house up for sale and threatened to move himself and Mary Ann into a decidedly less commodious cottage. In spite of all Robert’s efforts, Mary Ann remained firmly defiant. The deadlock lasted four months.

Finally, Mary Ann agreed to attend church with her father again and not discuss her new freethinking whimsies. Robert probably hoped that she would one day see the error of her ways and return to orthodoxy. An uneasy peace was therefore achieved between the two, and Mary Ann maintained her affection for her father, keeping house for him and caring for him through his last illness and death in 1849.

Isaac Evans was three years older than Mary Anne, and the two were, in Haight's words, "inseparable playmates" (5). Haight continues, "No doll or childish toy could hold her interest if Isaac was near. He is the first example of what [John Walter] Cross, [Mary Ann's husband and first biographer] called her 'absolute need of some one person who should be all in all to her, and to whom she should be all in all'" (5). Isaac was an indifferent mentor, in the way older brothers can be: he valued Mary Anne as a companion he could easily dominate, but when he received a pony of his own, Mary Anne's charms as a playmate paled (Haight 6). As they grew older, Isaac and Mary Anne were sent to separate schools. Robert was grooming Isaac to become his successor as the estate agent for the Newdigate-Newdegate family. The brother's and sister's paths diverged even while they were still living in the same household.

George Eliot left her chief literary remembrances of Isaac in *The Mill on the Floss*, in the relationship between Tom and Maggie Tulliver; and in the sonnet sequence "Brother and Sister." In the latter, the little sister, the narrator of the sequence, early shows the mentor-mentee quality of the relationship:

I held him wise, and when he talked to me
Of snakes and birds, and which God loved the best,

I thought his knowledge marked the boundary

Where men grew blind, though angels knew the rest. (1. 9-12)

This quote demonstrates how the mentee's adulation of her mentor places him in a position not far short of the divine. Marian suffered a breach with Isaac as well as with her father. The severance from Isaac occurred by his desire and initiative when in 1857 Marian made her family aware of her unconventional union with George Henry Lewes. Isaac was then forty-one, Marian thirty-eight. Isaac by this time had become as staunchly conventional a Tory as their father ever had been. Added to that, his sensibility, unlike hers, was still steeped in the narrow provincial mindset of their birth home in Warwickshire. Marian had superceded such provincialism as a result of her membership in a circle of some of the most radical intellectuals London could boast of. (Her political conservatism developed later in her life.) It is no wonder that the siblings found it impossible at this point in their lives to see eye to eye. Furthermore, Isaac pressured their sisters into breaking off relations with Marian as a consequence of her revelation of her relationship with Lewes. He himself stubbornly maintained a cold silence toward her for more than twenty years until she took a step which he could consider consistent with his own value system: legal marriage. In the last year of her life, Isaac deigned to reacknowledge his sister's existence and, like a dutiful brother, attended her funeral—though he must have found it mortifying that his secular humanist sister had to be buried in the unconsecrated ground of Highgate Cemetery.

Mary Anne's first mentor outside her family circle was Maria Lewis, a teacher at Mrs. Wallington's Boarding School in Nuneaton, which Mary Anne attended from 1828 to

1832. Lewis gave Mary Anne affection, support, and encouragement. The relationship continued by way of correspondence and holiday visits after Mary Anne left Mrs. Wallington's School. It was due to Lewis' guidance that Mary Anne embarked upon the severely Evangelical phase of her adolescence and young adulthood. Most important, Lewis was, as Karl puts it,

the first person to have an intellectual impact on Mary Anne. Attached though the young girl was to her father and brother, she nevertheless had not established any intellectual link to them, nor could she, given their own predilections. Her father was fixed, immovable, kind, but narrow and provincial in his beliefs; and Isaac was clearly moving away from intellectual endeavor and curiosity into business and other traditional male occupations. Lewis became, then, Mary Anne's first real support. (23)

It was, in fact, under Lewis' encouragement and instigation that Mary Ann's first publication, a poem about Christian self-renunciation, appeared in January 1840 in the *Christian Observer*.

As Mary Ann moved away from Evangelical Christianity and toward secular humanism, she and Maria Lewis found themselves more and more at odds in their thinking, values, and beliefs. Nevertheless, Lewis continued to make holiday visits to the Evans household. During her Christmas visit of 1846, Mary Ann and Lewis had a disagreement which led to a near final break. There was one last interchange between the two in 1874 when Marian sent Lewis £10 upon discovering that her old teacher was living in poverty. On the whole the relationship had been a beneficial one for Mary Ann.

Lewis had supportively nurtured Mary Ann's extraordinary intellectual gifts, which developed into one of the most powerful minds in nineteenth-century Britain. Here there is some similarity to the fictional female-female mentor-mentee relationship discussed in this study: Dinah-Hetty from *Adam Bede*. In this relationship the hierarchical assumption of the superiority of the mentor and the inferiority of the mentee is still present as it is in the male-female mentor-mentee relationship. In the actual relationship Mary Ann was doubtless Lewis' superior in terms of native intelligence. Lewis' superiority consisted mainly in the authority which attended Lewis' status as teacher and older woman. In Eliot's characterization of Dinah, on the other hand, it is clear that she conceives this character as morally superior to Hetty, who is vain, shallow, and convicted of child-murder. In both the actual and the fictional relationships, the equality of gender narrows the distance between these female partners. Moreover, like the earliest male-female mentoring relationships, the predominant tone of this relationship is nurture in contrast with the corrective tone predominant in the later male-female mentoring relationships.

William Wordsworth, whose poems had enraptured Mary Ann by 1839, educated her in the importance of emotion in human life. His work helped thaw the frigid, otherworldly Evangelicalism of her adolescence and young adulthood. Much of her later humanistic emphasis on the need to live in sympathetic community with those around us has its roots in Wordsworth's focus on the humble peasants of his poetry.

Mary Ann's shift from Evangelical Christianity to a broader freethinking perspective was facilitated by three important mentors: Charles and Caroline (Cara) Bray and Cara's sister Sara Hennell. Charles was a Coventry ribbon manufacturer who embraced all

manner of radical social and political causes and who had wide-ranging, if shallow, intellectual interests as well. Cara and Sara were born into an intellectual Unitarian family from Hackney. Cara, like Charles, was interested in social reform, and she taught in an infant school for poor children he had organized in Coventry. Sara was governess in the family of John Bonham Carter, M.P. She was fluent in German, had a working knowledge of Latin, and was well read in philosophy and theology. These three new friends, whom Mary Ann met in 1841-42 (Charles and Cara in November 1841; Sara in the summer of 1842), introduced her to a level of cultivated converse she had never known. She met many famous people at Rosehill, the Brays' home, especially figures outside the mainstream, like Robert Owen and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Previously, Mary Ann had found her own way in to the world of ideas through her extensive reading, but the Brays and Sara Hennell gave her entrance into a circle of people who together plumbed the ideas she had been reading and thinking about in intellectual isolation.

Two books written by members of this freethinking circle influenced Mary Ann at this time: Charles Hennell's *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (1838) and Charles Bray's *Philosophy of Necessity* (1841). Hennell, the brother of Cara and Sara, began his researches for *An Inquiry* at Cara's urging. Cara's Unitarian beliefs did not take her as deep into freethinking as her new husband Charles Bray was wont to go. She was hoping her brother's research would confirm the validity of Unitarian principles. He concluded, however, that "[t]hough Christianity could no longer be accepted as a divine revelation, it was certainly 'the purest form yet existing of natural religion'" (Haight 38; Hennell vii). Since it views religion as a human phenomenon, this work confirmed Mary

Ann in the humanistic direction in which she was moving.

Similarly, Bray's *Philosophy of Necessity* provided for Mary Ann a secular substitute to the Evangelical doctrine of Providence. As Karl puts it, "[*Philosophy of Necessity*] appealed to her desire for inevitability, for if we stretch her Calvinism somewhat, we can see that a move from predetermination to necessity or inevitability is not a great distance" (50). The principle of necessity, embodied by Nemesis, remained an important one for George Eliot; she understood it as the inevitability of moral consequences to all action. In many of the mentor-mentee relationships, in particular Daniel-Gwendolen, the mentor helps the mentee face the Nemesis in her (or his) life. The mentor, in this way, acts as a kind of externalized conscience for the mentee while the mentee struggles to form a conscience from within.

A third influential book from this period was David Friedrich Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu* (1835). In 1844 Mary Ann was given the task of translating it, in part through Sara Hennell's initiative. Like Charles Hennell in his *Inquiry*, Strauss blazed a "naturalistic" trail through the Biblical thicket, offering materialistic explanations to the text's miracle stories. Strauss himself thus became a sort of long-distance mentor to Mary Ann. She had the opportunity to meet him in Germany in 1858.

As I mentioned earlier, Charles and Cara Bray's interests extended beyond intellectual matters to social concerns; they influenced Mary Ann in this direction as well. Charles was an avowed Owenite and even attempted unsuccessfully to run his ribbon factory according to Owen's principles. He was also an advocate of universal education, an issue which affected the large segment of Coventry's population which happened to be

dissenting poor. Mary Ann's Church of England background had presented maintenance of rigid class distinctions and the status quo as the proper approach to society's ills, so the Brays' democratic ideas—not simply talked about but also put into action—gave Mary Ann an entirely fresh viewpoint on social matters. In Karl's words, the Brays' influence on Mary Ann in this regard helped her “shap[e] for herself a holistic view of people and life . . . [and] see society as an entity” (50).

Mary Ann Evans was briefly a mentee to the medical doctor and scholar Robert Brabant. When his daughter Rebecca married and left his household in 1843, Dr. Brabant invited Mary Ann to come for a visit to his home in Devizes. He even nicknamed her “Deutera” to signify that he saw her as a “second daughter” (Haight 49). The two became fast friends, studying together and taking walks in apparent oblivion of everyone else in the household. Mary Ann wrote to Cara Bray: “I am in a little heaven here, Dr. Brabant being its archangel” (165). Trouble entered paradise in the form of Dr. Brabant's jealous wife, aided and abetted by her sister Susan Hughes. Mrs. Brabant issued an ultimatum, and Mary Ann consequently found herself on her way back to Coventry.

Though the relationships Mary Ann had with her father, brother, Maria Lewis, Wordsworth, the Brays, Sara Hennell, Charles Hennell, and David Strauss were primal in her personal and intellectual development, the brief relationship she had with Dr. Brabant is in many ways most interesting because of its resemblance to some of the fictional mentor-mentee relationships I consider in this work. In particular, the Casaubon-Dorothea relationship has close parallels to the Dr. Brabant-Mary Ann relationship. Dr. Brabant seems to be a model for Mr. Casaubon, because, like George Eliot's sterile

scholar, Dr. Brabant was “a learned man who used up his literary energies in thought and desire to do rather than in actual doing, and whose fastidiousness made his work something like Penelope’s web. Ever writing and rewriting, correcting and destroying, he never got farther than the introductory chapter of a book which he intended to be epoch-making. . .” (Linton 43). Similarly, like the young Mary Ann, Dorothea’s first impulsive perception of Mr. Casaubon discounts others’ more accurate (if unkind) views of him as ““a great bladder for dried peas to rattle in”” and ““a mummy”” with ““one foot in the grave”” and with blood composed of ““all semicolons and parentheses”” (*Middlemarch* 58, ch. 6; 71, ch. 8). Instead of a withered pedant, she sees the “affable archangel” (24; ch. 3) of knowledge come to deliver her from the superficial social tyranny of her community.

In using the epithet “archangel” to characterize Dorothea’s perception of Casaubon, just as she had chosen it some thirty years previous in reference to Dr. Brabant, George Eliot elucidates in part the character of the mentor-mentee relationship. The mentor, who is usually male, occupies a status superior to the mentee, who is usually female. Indeed, by pairing an archangel with a human being, George Eliot sets a gulf which is impassible by any merely human female. In the passage from *Paradise Lost* which George Eliot alludes to, Eve ““The story heard attentive, and was filled/ With admiration, and deep muse, to hear/ Of things so high and strange”” (Milton 7.51-53). The similarity between Eve and Dorothea is readily apparent. Dorothea’s disillusionment comes soon, however, as it must have for the young Mary Ann after having been ejected from the Brabantian paradise. The archangels lose their prestige and, like the famous humbug of children’s

literature, the Wizard of Oz, are revealed to be fallible mortals after all.

Finally, Marian discovered another long-distance mentor in Ludwig Feuerbach, whose influence upon her religious views I discuss extensively in this work.¹ Her translation of *Das Wesen Christentums* was published by John Chapman in 1854. Feuerbach gave Marian primarily a philosophical grounding for the humanism she had nominally adopted.

In later life Marian Lewes herself took on the role of mentor.² Most of her mentees were younger people who had been influenced profoundly by her writings and who sought her out as a kind of moral and spiritual guru. One partial exception to this pattern was Maria Congreve, wife of Richard Congreve, Britain's foremost proponent of Comtean positivism. Maria was one of the earliest mentees, and she came to know Marian as a friend before she found out about her fiction writing. Maria, nevertheless, fell beneath the intelligent charm of Marian's personality. Their relationship was reestablished in 1859 after their having met briefly in Coventry in 1849, Maria's father, Dr. John Bury, having attended Robert Evans in his last illness. In 1859 the George Eliot incognito was beginning to slip, and Marian was making judicious revelations of her authorship of the bestselling *Scenes of Clerical Life* and *Adam Bede* to selected friends. She made such a revelation to Maria in Lucerne, presenting her with inscribed copies of the two books. As Karl puts it, "[t]his was heady stuff for the young woman [Maria] and, of course, intensified her devotion" (315).

The mentees who followed later in Eliot's career came to her as starstruck fans approaching a celebrity. There were too many to discuss here in depth. I will concentrate on Edith Simcox and then John Cross, whom Marian married after Lewes' death. Before

launching into that discussion, I will briefly mention two others: Elma Stuart and Alexander Main. Elma Stuart was a woodcarving widow who called Marian her “spiritual mother” and, beginning in 1872, continually sent her presents. Many of the gifts Elma herself carved from wood, such as a walnut mirror frame and an oak table, all of these hand-wrought gifts decorated “elaborately . . . with flowers, birds, leaves, and inscriptions linking her [Elma’s] name with George Eliot’s” (Haight 452). Elma, a loyal “daughter” to the last, was buried next to Marian’s grave in Highgate Cemetery.

Alexander Main was a young Scot who, having abandoned his study for the ministry, lived with his mother. In Haight’s words, a favorite occupation of Main’s was to spend “whole days reading aloud by the sea-shore the works of George Eliot. . .” (440). Main offered his own tribute to Eliot in seeking her permission to compile quotations from her works into a book entitled *Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings in Prose and Verse Selected from the Works of George Eliot*. John Blackwood, Eliot’s publisher, who held the copyright, was reluctant to cooperate though he did in the end, referring to Main privately as “the Gusher” (Haight 440). The book was published in December 1871. Later Main put together a second miscellany entitled *The George Eliot Birthday Book*.

Edith Simcox, a gifted scholar and impassioned social reformer, first met Marian in 1872 when on assignment to review *Middlemarch* for the *Academy*. The acquaintance developed into a friendship over the succeeding months though Simcox’s intense adoration was by all accounts one-sided. Karl observes: “Simcox was a fearful presence, almost a specter of destruction in her obsession with embracing, touching, kissing, or simply being close to her idol” (576). So draining did Marian find Simcox’s adoration,

that during times when Marian was under heightened stress, such as in the first months after Lewes' death, she felt she didn't have the emotional strength to endure Simcox's visits and would not see her. Marian thus experienced with Edith Simcox a mentor-mentee relationship conducted at a higher pitch of intensity than any of the mentor-mentee relationships she depicted in her fiction. Karl's assessment of Simcox's devotion for Marian is revealing: "In some way, emotionally, physically, or otherwise, she had turned to Eliot as the guide in life we normally associate with a religious quest for the divine" (505). There is also a good possibility that Simcox's intensity was an indication of erotic passion though we have no direct evidence of this. The word *homosexual* was not even coined until the 1890s, and the Victorians perceived same-sex "attachments" with a greater degree of fluidity between platonic and erotic states than we tend to do today. Sexuality is a factor which comes into play in some (roughly half) of the mentor-mentee relationships. The most intense of the fictional mentor-mentee relationships, Daniel-Gwendolen, is the only one Eliot created after having known Simcox. Eliot perhaps drew on her experience with Simcox in depicting the totality with which Gwendolen submerges herself into the relationship with Daniel, which she believes will be her moral and spiritual salvation.

John Cross was an intimate friend of the Leweses for almost ten years before G. H. Lewes died. Lewes had already become acquainted with other members of Cross' family, and both Lewes and Marian met Cross in Rome in 1869. Eventually he became their financial advisor as well as their friend. He made himself useful taking care of all sorts of errands for them (from setting up home delivery of fresh fish to finding them a country

home), and they affectionately referred to him as their “tall nephew.” After Lewes died in 1878, Cross—who had recently lost his mother—and Marian became even closer; and they were married in May 1880, just six months before her death.

Cross was not by any means Marian’s equal intellectually, but given the mentor-mentee character of their relationship, that inequality did not seem to cause dissatisfaction for either of them. One of the activities they involved themselves in after Lewes’ death was reading Dante’s *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* together in Italian. Cross’ Italian was rudimentary in comparison with Marian’s, but in a mentor-mentee relationship, the one-sided transmitting and receiving of wisdom and knowledge is normative. In a curiously circular fashion at the end of her life, Marian returned to a Casaubon-Dorothea relationship, only this time she played the role of the moribund Casaubon to Cross’ blooming, naive Dorothea, gender switches notwithstanding.

NOTES

¹ I do not concur with David Williams that George Henry Lewes should be included as one of Marian's mentors (120). Whereas inequality between mentor and mentee is the keynote of those relationships, I see Marian and Lewes' relationship as much more a partnership between equals. He certainly encouraged her, most notably to begin writing fiction in the first place. Nevertheless, I believe the encouragement was mutual. During the years they were together, Lewes worked hard to establish his footing as a respected scientist. Marian's support in this endeavor must have been as important as his was for her writing.

² For a more extensive discussion of Marian's experience as a mentor, see Chapter 8, "Old and Young" (pp. 232-67), in Rosemarie Bodenheimer's *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, Her Letters and Fiction*.

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